



Illuminating the Journey of Undergraduate Counsellor students:

Hearing their voices and Experiences of Development

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Counselling in the

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By Luisa Catizane Ramos

University of Canterbury

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## Abstract

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This thesis is about hearing and illuminating the voices of students regarding their experiences of development during their journey of counselling education. Researcher intention was to be a writer for participants' voices and experiences of development. This thesis reveals a list of specific experiences that promoted or/and have been promoting development for these participants and it also offers meaningful knowledge about development that might be helpful for the counselling and caring profession field.

To clearly hear and illuminate students' voices, a qualitative descriptive methodology was utilised and four participants gathered and they greatly helped in the construct of this work. A safe environment, where they could freely express self, was provided and researcher and participants engaged in depth one to one interviews with open-ended questions. The interviews lasted for around one and an half hours each. The data were analysed for themes and the thematic analysis revealed two key themes: objective experiences of development and subjective experiences of development. It also brings to light seven associated sub-themes: tendency to actualise; authenticity and self-acceptance; vulnerability, non-judgmentalism, and compassion; support from tutors; difficult personal experiences; self-care; as well as counselling training and deep learning.

This research endeavour is only one way of illuminating the data and although the experiences of development are endless and cannot be generalised from the nature of this work, the themes emerged from participants voices also resinated with researcher as a counsellor. This is because in one person's story and experience there might be aspects that will resonate with others stories and experiences. Readers are invited to open up their hearts to this world of counselling students and to reflect and even look deeper in their own experiences adding to their personal self-development. This research enables those interested in experiences of development, to use the knowledge shared by the

participants as a guide to enhance the development of counsellor students, even perhaps, to enhance the development of caring professional or/and people in general.

This thesis is to all people in the Peace Industry,  
who are working on the construct of a better world.

And this thesis is especially dedicated to Augustus and Santiago,  
who are the best part of my world.

## Acknowledgements

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### *A Poem of Thankfulness to Kate and Participants*

*From seed to flower it can take, sometimes, a little while.*

*Looking back it feels like we walked together for miles,*

*Now we've got a new book about our tears and our smiles.*

*You showed me vulnerability and strength...*

*Here is my thankfulness.*

*I embraced this journey with my soul and wrote down what I was told*

*You stood by me and spoke out your voices freely*

*I wrote with your hands and I was a mirror of your feelings.*

*You showed me your silence and also words of meaning.*

*Here is my thankfulness.*

*Your beautiful hearts made me an instrument of peace,*

*You gave me your time, your ideas and your authentic face.*

*In the last season, the egg cracked and what came out it was a sparkly surprise:*

*We all want to grow wiser and to develop in the direction of the sky...*

*Here is my thankfulness.*

(Ramos, 2019)

First and foremost I want to offer my deepest gratitude to mother universe. She provided me with warmth, courage, faith, and strength along all my journey of writing this research. She sent to me all the people I needed to complete this research, Kate Reid and the participants, and also the chance to learn from their beautiful and meaningful content.

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Eternal gratitude to my sons, Augustus and Santiago, who are my suns in every season of existence.

Thanks to you who are about to read this research. You are welcome to become part of this kind of work if you haven't yet. People involved in this kind of research give voice to other people to express the self freely, work towards human development, and a better world. I hope you join us.

Thanks to all people who are committed to themselves into this endless journey of development and growth. By developing and growing your own self, you are developing and growing the whole world.

Final thanks to the whole world, for all that helped me and thanks for all who have not helped me... yet.

Thanks, thanks, and thanks.

## Helpful Information to Transcriptions

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The following information is helpful on the understanding of the abbreviations used within the transcription of research data:

[ ] Information added to clarify context or meaning

(...) Words, phases or sentences edited out

... Pause present within the narrative

*Italics* Participants' quoted narrative in chapter 4



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### 1.1 Background of the Thesis

*“In order to do as well as possible for patients or clients it is crucial to be able to know yourself as well as you can.”*

Sinason, 1999, p.157

Sinason’s phrase suggests that the development of the client it is associated, in some way, to the development of the counsellor. According to her, when the source is yourself and you are encountering a vulnerable ‘other’, you need to have the key tool of your trade as honed as possible (Sinason, 1999, p.158). What therapist can bear to hear in themselves, they can hear in their patients, what therapists can find in themselves, they can recognise in others (Aveline, 1990, p.333). In recent years, the “use of self” has come to be recognised as playing a central role in all counselling approaches (Johns, 1996). After all, counsellors can only help another person if they can help themselves. This emphasis is founded on the belief that a therapist needs to attain a significant degree of psychological health and awareness in order to be able to help another person to do the same (Donati & Watts, 2006, p. 475). People cannot offer what they don’t have and this idea is vital to counselling and to other caring professions.

The notion that development is vital to the proper functioning of counsellor has been illuminated by Rowan (1976) who writes about the obligation and responsibility of therapists to constantly address their own development. Rogers (1961) addresses this issue in his book *On Becoming a Person* (one of his principal works) in which he writes of his own development as a professional therapist and as a person. According to both of them, not only do counsellors benefit from development but that clients

may also benefit in the long run. Accordingly, Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) stated, “It is, in fact, intrinsically appealing for therapists and counsellors to understand the elements that contribute to their own professional growth and development” (p. 505).

Given the complex nature of the work of counsellors, who can only help the client to develop if they learn how to develop themselves, it seems especially important for the counselling profession to expand knowledge regarding the experiences of counsellor development. Counsellor development is a dominant theme in professional literature as counsellor educators seek to provide the most effective training (Furr and Carroll, 2003; Neukrug, Lovell, & Parker, 1996; Spruill & Benshoff, 2000; Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilber, & Garret, 2001). Although counsellor educators have theoretical and training models to foster counsellors’ professional development (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2014; Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003) and personal development (Corey, 2001; Hazler & Kottler, 1994; Kaye & Jackson, 2003, O’Leary, Crowley, & Keane, 1994), there is insufficient research about this process from the perspective of counsellor undergraduate students. There is also a lack of research that takes into consideration the development of the counsellor undergraduate student as a holistic process where its parts are not reduced to categories. As yet, little attention has been paid to identify what the experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students are. Recognizing the importance of counsellor development a qualitative study to will be undertaken in order to give voice to counsellor students to illuminate their experiences of development and therefore, expand scientific knowledge about it. Specifically, this research is interested in identifying distinct experiences that promote counselling development.

Acquiring knowledge about counsellor student’s development has potential implications for education. Research has stated that it is important to understand students’ experiences in counselling programs so that counsellor educators can best facilitate their development (Granello, 2002). There is also support for counsellor educators to gain a rich understanding of counsellor students’ experiences, so they can match their pedagogical techniques and sequence classes to fit the developmental stage of the students (Granello & Hazler, 1998). Likewise, according to Furr and Carroll (2003) researchers



have suggested that counsellor educators would benefit from asking counsellors students about their development to facilitate effective training methods. Hackney and Cormier (2005) suggested that learning to counsel others is a developmental process and that individuals could be educated and trained to understand professional issues, the context of helping, and the development of personal qualities that facilitate helping.

## **1.2 Researcher Interest**

The initial inspiration for this study came from observing self and friends' development by going through personal and professional changes during counselling education. Since I started my counselling training, I have been changing noticeably and I can see that the same phenomenon also happens to friends who are also going through counselling education. Throughout the history of counsellor education, it has been observed that students, studying to be counsellors change as they progress through the educational process (Brown & Srebalus, 1996; Stoltenberg, 1998). The educational journey from personal development of a counselling student to an effective professional helper is well documented in the literature (Cory, 2001; Hazler & Kottler, 1994) but what really are these experiences of development during counselling education? What to do with them? And, given the importance of development in counselling, what are the conditions and experiences that promote development? What are the experiences that hinder development? How does someone become a great helper?

My journey into becoming an instrument of helping others began when I was a little child. Friends and other members of the family used to come to me to open up themselves and to ask for help when they were not feeling that great. I remember asking myself who I could help and what the best way of helping someone was. When I was eighteen years old I started a five year degree in psychology and during that time, aside from my studies, I was committed and helped to create two charity projects. Helping has always been part of who I am but after marriage, becoming a mother, getting divorced and starting a master's degree in counselling, my views changed, regarding how to be a great helper.

By the experiences I went through, I realised that to be an effective helper I need first to be able to help myself. I cannot give what I don't have. This idea strengthened during the time I was counselling clients. I realised that I could only take my clients as deep as I went myself and the urge for development, since then, became a serious commitment to me. That is how this research project was born, through my desire to become the best helper I can be and also the desire to gain more knowledge about the experiences of development for counsellor students.

### **1.3 Aims of this Research**

The aim of this research is to hear and illuminate participants' voices about their experiences of development during counselling training and expand the knowledge about counselling education and development, by providing:

- An understanding and description of what the experiences of development are from the viewpoint of undergraduate counselling students.
- An exploration of the experiences that undergraduate counsellor students perceive as contributing to their development.
- An exploration of the how undergraduate counsellor students use their own experiences to develop their selves during their programme of study.

Hackney and Cormier (2005) proposed the journey of becoming an effective counsellor as a developmental process which an individual could be educated and trained to develop qualities that facilitate helping. This study's intention is to expand the body of knowledge by giving voice to counselling students. To illuminate the journey of becoming a counsellor and to unfold a deeper understanding of the experiences of development and to make the concept more meaningful (Dunne, 2005). Conducting this study is a response to the call for more research on development of counselling undergraduate students and will add to the existing body of knowledge. The outcomes can be used to enhance counsellor education by promoting information that will assist in creating new understanding to support best counsellor development.

## **1.4 Research Approach**

To hear the voice of counsellor students a qualitative descriptive approach will be used. This approach emerged as the most congruent, as this methodology will allow the voices of counselling students to be clearly heard, without over-interpretation or transformation (van Aalst, 2013). The data will be collected directly from the participants who are undergraduate counselling students and who want to share their experiences of development. The data will be analysed for themes, for ease of understanding and sharing of the knowledge and insights gained with counselling educators and may also resonate with others in the caring professions.

## **1.5 Overview of Thesis**

This thesis will be divided into six chapters. This first introductory chapter is followed by a literature review analysing what has been previously discovered as important themes in professional and personal development of undergraduate counsellor students. The third chapter discusses the methodology on which this research is based and describes the intended methods applied. Chapter four reports and analyses the findings from research and it is followed by chapter five presenting a discussion about the findings and what the literature says about those themes discovered from research. Chapter six describes conclusions drawn from the research and discussion and offers recommendations on how the findings may influence or guide counsellor education and development in the future.

### 2.1 The Literature Search

The focus of the literature search was on the experiences of development for counsellor undergraduate students. The literature search took on utilising UC Library. Data base, NZresearch.org.nz, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, OAIster and Google Scholar with the terms *human development*, *counsellor development*, *identity development*, *experiences of development* and *counsellor experiences of development* into the search engine. More than two hundred results were found so a variety of phrases were added, aiming to refine the search, such as *undergraduate counsellor student development*, *counsellor student voice*, *undergraduate counsellor student experiences of development*. Refining the search caused an evident change in the number of results. Interestingly enough, when the new search took place because these phrases were expected to be significant in counselling education, the results were few. At first, it was noticeable that there were no results that linked *undergraduate counsellor student voice* with *counsellor development*. Second, there were also no results that linked *undergraduate counsellor student* with the concept and process of *development* in its mutuality and inclusive nature of professional and personal domains. These two gaps in the literature expose the relevant need to expand the limited body of knowledge about this theme and this is another valuable justification for undertaking this research. During the period of the research, as other themes of importance in counsellor development emerged from the interviews, other search terms were added to supplement the initial findings. They included: *authenticity*, *vulnerability*, *self-care* as examples not identified in the initial search but clearly important.

Although the literature and research on counsellor development have repeatedly emphasised the importance of gaining more knowledge about the factors associated with the development as counsellor (Auxier et al., 2003; Gelso, 2006; Stoltenberg, 1981; Gazzola et al., 2011; Moss, Gibson &

Dollarhide, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003), the literature exploring development of counsellor undergraduate students is limited in bread and depth (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003; Coll, Dumas, Trotter, & Freeman, 2013, Patterson & Heller Levitt, 2012; Gelso, 2006; Lambie, Hayes, Griffith, Limberg, & Mullen, 2014; Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). Granello (2002) stated that it is important to understand students' experiences in counselling programmes so that counsellor educators can best facilitate their development. There is also support for counsellor educators to gain a rich understanding of counsellor students' experiences, so they can match their pedagogical techniques and sequence classes to fit the developmental stage of the students (Granello & Hazler, 1998).

Counsellor educators would benefit from knowing more about students' development (Goodyear & Bernard, 1998) but one of the problems which remains is that the promotion of development has been largely carried out within postgraduate masters or doctorate programmes (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003; Coll, Dumas, Trotter, & Freeman, 2013, Patterson & Heller Levitt, 2012; Gelso, 2006; Lambie, Hayes, Griffith, Limberg, & Mullen, 2014; Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). In addition, another problem is that previous literature has focused on concepts such as research self-efficacy (Bishop & Bieschke, 1998), research interest (Kahn & Scott, 1997), research training environment (Gelso, 2006) and research competence (Wampold, 1986). Souders (2009), for example, used a phenomenological approach and focused on personal development by exploring the lived experiences of counsellor's students while in training. The study's focus was on personal development but counsellor identity development includes the personal and professional development. A focus on only one aspect does not privilege a holistic view of the phenomenon. In contrast, Gazola, Stefano, Audet & Theriault (2011) focused on professional identity and investigated what counselling doctoral students perceived as contributing to their development. Theirs was a qualitative approach: they developed a semi-structured interview protocol and interviewed 10 graduate students. Again, the researchers focused only on one side of development which, in this case, was the professional side.

In much of the research mentioned above, whether quantitative methods or qualitative approaches were used to explore counsellors' development, they would not allow for the experiences of development to be illuminated as a whole, without reducing them into categories. This does not fit the

goal of this research. Other research (for example, Bishop & Bieschke, 1998; Gelso, 2006; Kahn & Scott, 1997; and Wampold, 1986), although it has a focus on counsellors' development, little attention was paid to identify what the experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students are. The purpose of the present study is to undertake an exploration into the experiences of development as it is experienced by undergraduate counsellor students.

## **2.2 Personal Development and Professional Development**

Personal and professional development have been explained as the two parts that embody the process of counsellor development (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1996). Counsellor development is “multidimensional and complex” and embraces the theoretical constructs of personal and professional development (Souders, 2009, p. 45). Development is said to relate to “starting something” (Irving & Williams, 1999, p. 518) and there are many philosophical and theoretical knowledge and aspects to personal development and professional development. They briefly defines the theoretical constructs of professional and personal development and the definitions which best provide the foundation for this study. In short, personal development refers to the acquisition of a specific personal trait or quality, and professional development refers to acquisition of skills or knowledge associated with becoming a counsellor.

*Personal development* refers to a process of “individuation” (Auxier et al., 2003, p.25) and involves self-reflection on social and cultural dimensions of identity (Hoshmand, 2004, p. 84). The focus on personal happens with a turn in counselling theoretical orientation towards “the counsellor’s use of self” (Donati & Watts, 2005) since “society has become more democratic and egalitarian” (Aponte & Carlsen, 2009, p.8). In contrast, *professional development* has been described as specific tasks to maintain counsellor development such as further training, supervision, and ethical practice (Bayne, Horton, Merry, & Noyes, 1994; Horton & Varma, 1997). Elton-Wilson (1994, p.71) states that “professional development is concerned with doing needs, such as qualifications, techniques, theories, while personal development is concern with being needs, such as authenticity, vulnerability, self-

actualisation, intimacy”). Wilkins (1997) writes that professional development refers to the acquisition of ‘skills and knowledge’ while personal development refers to ‘everything else which facilitates being a practising counsellor’.

Professional development and personal development overlap each other and are likely to occur simultaneously and to influence one another, which is consistent with Rogers’ (1958) notion of congruence. Counsellor professional development is a process that is often parallel and interchangeable with personal development, as many of the skills associated with effective counselling (e.g. empathy, self-awareness, critical thinking) are also personal characteristics (Sounder, 2009, p. 46). Similarly, as Skovholt and Ronnestad (1996) note, the relationship between personal and professional development is complex, reciprocal, and constantly changing over time. This suggests that, although a distinction could be established between personal development and professional development, there are an ‘inevitable interplay’ (Johns, 1996) between these two constructs which are mutually inclusive concepts and processes. Donati and Watts, (2006, p. 476) writes that “although a distinction may be made between personal and professional development, the two are not mutually exclusive concepts or processes and counsellors have increasingly come to realise the intertwining of the personal and professional aspects of functioning of the therapist/counsellor” (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1996, p.1). In a similar way Wilkins (1997, p.5) observed that “counsellor development is a spectrum of personal and professional needs instead of two distinct halves of a whole”. Likewise, this research will make a significant effort to accurately and holistically become aware of the experiences and the whole spectrum of development for counsellor students.

For these reasons, for the purposes of this study, the terms *professional development* and *personal development* will be reduced to the term *development* to eliminate redundancy in writing. The theoretical construct of development guides this research because there is a need in the literature to know more about the process of counsellor development (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

## **2.3 Counsellor Development**

Since the counsellor can only take their clients as far as they have been themselves (Sinason, 1999), researchers are paying more attention to counsellor development (Auxier et al., 2003; Gelso, 2006, Stoltenberg, 1981; Gazzola et al., 2011; Moss, Gibson & Dollarhide, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Academic performance is no longer the primary focus when evaluating counsellor competency (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999).

Furr and Carroll (2003) researched critical incidents of counsellor students' development and they suggest that participants were significantly influenced by their field experiences. To design appropriate educational experiences that address all aspects of counsellor development, counsellor educators need to identify and examine experiences that influence counsellor development (Furr & Carroll, 2003, p. 483). Furr and Carroll expanded the body of knowledge about the importance of experiences on student counsellor development.

Spruill and Benshoff (2000) also made a great effort to understand counsellors' development. They studied the development process of counsellors adopting and practising their personal theory of counselling during training. They found that developing a theoretical orientation during counselling training continually evolves as the counsellor progresses in her or his professional and personal development (Paris, Linville, & Rosen, 2006) however, there is limited research to support the construct of whether counsellors continually develop as they get more experience. Dawes (1994), for example, researched counsellor development and the findings of his study suggest that there is no relationship between the level of the counsellor's experience the outcome. Another approach to the study of counsellor development is to study changes in how practitioners experience themselves as counsellors/therapists in comparison to a range of parameters related to their work over time (Ronnestad and Skovholt, 2003, p. 7). The approach used by Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) was to conduct a cross-sectional, longitudinal qualitative study in which they interviewed 100 counsellors about counsellor development. They selected eight topics as categories of inquiry to organise the interview transcription which guided the data analysis. They identified 14 themes of counsellor



development across the phases of the research. Themes included: professional development, which involves an increasing higher order integration of the professional self and personal self; an intense commitment and willingness to learn and develop; professional development is a life-long process; personal life influences professional functioning and development throughout the professional life span; interpersonal sources of influence propel professional development more than impersonal sources of influences; and that extensive experience with suffering contributes to heightened recognition, acceptance, and appreciation of human variability. The results exposed that interpersonal experiences in the personal life domain and the professional life domain are significant sources of influence for counsellor development.

From the literature search on counsellor development it evident that much of the research suggested that counsellor development is affected by counsellor experiences and that counsellor development is extremely important to the practice of an effective counsellor. Although the importance of the experiences of development for counsellor students has been well documented in the literature, the body of knowledge about the experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students is still limited. This research contributes to the body of knowledge about experiences of development for counsellor undergraduate students.

## **2.4 Research on Counsellor Development**

In 1999, Neufeldt noted that there is growing interest in studying the development of the professional counsellor/therapist. However, there is little in the literature reporting undergraduate counsellor experience, since the promotion of counsellor development has been primarily been the focus of postgraduate programmes. In the literature search for this study many studies on counsellor development were found but their relevance to this research was limited due to the specific aims or direction of the research being reported.

Research that has been carried out on counsellor student development has predominately focused on identity development (Auxier et al., 2003; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Ronnestad & Skovolt,

2003). These several studies focused on models and theories of counsellor identity development by generating a tentative substantive theory that conceptualised this theme. For example, Auxier et al. (2003) used a grounded theory approach to explore the identity development experiences of master's degree counsellor students to develop a theory of counsellor identity development. They selected eight full-time master's degree students for two rounds of individual interviews and a focus group. A recycling identity formation process emerged from the data analysis: conceptual learning, experiential learning, and external evaluation. They found that as participants developed as counsellors, they continued to value conceptual learning experiences but that over time, experiential learning became progressively more important. Participants' assessment of the external evaluation they received varied, depending on whether they believed the evaluation as validation or non-validation of their views of themselves as counsellors and as individuals. Moss, Gibson and Dollarhide (2014) used a ground theory approach to investigate practising counsellor's identity development at nodal points during their career. Data were collected through recorded focus groups and the aim was to capture rich descriptions of the process of identity development. The results indicated that six themes were important to the identity development of counsellors: adjustment to expectations, confidence and freedom, separation versus integration, experienced guide, continuous learning, and work with clients. In addition, a process emerged that included transformational tasks at each professional life change. These studies all looked at developing a theory of counsellor development and are of great value in counsellor education; however, developing a theory is outside the scope of this study.

Gazzola et al. (2011) explores doctoral psychology students' perceptions of their professional identities. The qualitative study was guided by two research questions: What experiences and conditions do counselling psychology doctoral students perceive as contributing to their professional identities? and What experiences and conditions do counsellor psychology doctoral students perceive as hindering their professional identity? They developed a semi-structured interview protocol and interviewed doctoral students. Their analysis identified seven categories of experiences which participants perceived as fostering their development: the experience of providing service to clients, the positive influence of institutionalised training, giving and receiving supervision, the importance of

role models and mentors, a resonance between the personal and the professional, an induction into the professional community, and, an emerging sense of expertness. Their analysis also identified four categories of experiences which participants perceived as hindering their development: exposure to negative views of the profession, a sense of disillusionment with the profession, feeling disappointed with institutionalized training, and dealing with internal conflicts. Prosek and Hurt (2014) also focused on counsellor identity in their study. They designed a qualitative research project to consider the measurement of professional identity development among counsellor masters students. They found that advanced counsellor students demonstrated greater professional development compared with novice counsellor students and that no differences existed between groups in terms of their understanding of professional orientation and values. Although the findings of their studies have important implications for the practice of counselling within the larger mental health delivery system, as well as for the training of counsellors, the problem remains that the promotion of counsellor development has been primarily been the focus of postgraduate programmes. Considering that undergraduate study is the initial preparatory experience for counsellors and, because of that, more attention needs to be paid to this issue amongst this population.

Hibert et al. (1992) conducted a study to determine counsellor and counselling psychologists' views of their professional identity. To achieve this, a six-page, open-ended questionnaire was distributed to all potential participants. They found that it is a counsellor's sense of professional identity that provides the vision which guides long-term goal setting and continuing professional development. Mellin, Hunt, and Nichols (2011), also examined how counsellors perceived their professional identity. They addressed counsellor professional identity and for that questionnaires were sent to 750 counsellors, in United States of America who passed NCE (National Counsellor Examination for Licensure and Certification) within the past 10 years. They found that the participant's professional identities seemed to embrace a unified professional identity and seemed to be grounded in a developmental, prevention, and wellness orientation towards helping. Although both studies provide worthwhile insights for the current sense of counsellor identity, their focus was on establishing a cohesive professional identity for counsellors through the use of questionnaires.

Models and theories of counsellor development (Blocher, 1983; Loganbill et al., 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981; Gazzola et al., 2011; Auxier et al., 2003; Moss, Gibson & Dollarhide, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003) must be considered as a fundamental topic in counsellor education. That is because a deeper understanding of the identity development of counsellor students can help counsellor educators provide education and supervision that are more sensitive to the student's developmental experiences (Auxier et al., 2003). However there is a significant number into this aspect of counsellor development and the intent of this research was not to further that area of study but to illuminate the experiences of development that are important to undergraduate counsellor students.

It is recognised here, that models and theories of counsellor development may affect some of the themes identified within this research, but developing a theory of identity development is otherwise considered outside the scope of this research project and, hence, although the findings of these researchers are interesting they are not relevant to the current project. Boders (1989) and Holloway (1987) challenged the value of models and developmental theories and argued that theorists should sediment counsellor development in the actual developmental experiences of counsellors: "There is a need for description of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of supervisees at various developmental stages" (Border, 1989, p.17). This research will help to sediment counsellor development in the experiences of development.

## **2.5 Summary**

The focus of the literature search was on the experiences of development for counsellor undergraduate student. Significant knowledge on many topics of relevance to counsellor development was found, for example, many researchers suggested before that counsellor development is affected by counsellor experiences and that counsellor development is vital to the practice of an effective counsellor; however, there was little in the literature reporting undergraduate counsellor experiences of development. This gap in the literature highlights the need to explore undergraduate counsellor experiences of development.

In order to eliminate redundancy in writing and for the purposes of this study, the terms ‘professional development’ and ‘personal development’ will be reduced to the term development. Many studies that approach counsellor development were found but their relevance to this research was restricted due to the specific aims or direction of the research being reported. This research hopes to amplify knowledge about counsellor development and their experiences of development. Therefore, developing a theory of identity development is otherwise considered outside the scope of this research project. The intent is to illuminate participants’ voices for greater trustworthiness and accuracy about their experiences of development. A qualitative descriptive approach emerged as the most congruent for this study, as this methodology enable researcher to illuminate the experiences of counsellor students by allowing their voices to be clearly heard. The methodology and methods’ embraced for this research is detailed on the next chapter.

*Behind a method, there is a human being.  
There is a being, a search and a methodology in between.  
I am trying to reach development in a scientific way,  
Searching for the truth seven weeks a day.  
Doing it with joy is my method of choice:  
To tangle up hearts with the people's voice.*

*Luisa Ramos*

### 3.1 Methodological Aims

This research explores the experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students by listening to them, recording their experiences, and then communicating their responses. In planning this research credence to this method was given by Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the hospice movement and “whose only methodology was ‘listening to people’ ” (Oliviere, 2005, p.203). Only if the voice is heard can there be certainty that it is accurately conveyed to a wider audience (van Aalst, 2013). Only those who are counsellor students can meaningfully answer the question of what the experiences of development are for counsellor students. To capture those experiences, the methodology for this investigation serves, above all, to illuminate and to open space for their voices to be expressed freely.

This study is based on objective and subjective experiences whereby truth is “generated within the individual” (Sanders, 2006, p.21) and constructed from experiences. In this research the focus is on counselling student experiences of development. The significance and validity of experience is capture in the words of Rogers (1961)

Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me (pp.23-24).

Research on exploration of experiences of development will often utilise qualitative methods to answer the research questions because of the subjective nature of the investigation. When considering which research methodology to use for this study, a qualitative descriptive approach emerged as the most congruent, because this methodology enables the researcher to explore the experiences of counsellor students by allowing their voices to be clearly heard for better trustworthiness and accuracy, thus preventing the loss of meaning and over interpretation.

This chapter includes a description of qualitative research and its philosophical orientation, rigour, and credibility. Research objectives are incorporated and the chapter also provides the rationale for the qualitative descriptive approach with a description of interviewing the participants and analysis. Special consideration is given to matters of ethics.

### **3.2 Qualitative Research**

*"There are three truths: my truth, your truth, and the truth."*

(Hampaté Bâ, 1957)

This study acknowledges that the participants' views of truth are composed of many local and specific realities that can only be subjectively perceived (Weaver & Olsen, 2006), hence it adopts a qualitative research approach to illuminate participants' truths by enabling them to articulate their experiences of self-development.

### **3.2.1 The Scope of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is difficult to define clearly because it is essentially multimethod and privileges no single method over any other. Multiple uses and meanings of the methods of qualitative research make it difficult for researchers to agree on any essential definition of the field, for it is never just one thing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). For the purpose of this research, I borrow the attempt to define it from Denzin & Lincoln (2005) when they paraphrase Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg (1992):

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscut the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions (p.4).

Qualitative research is an appropriate methodology for developing an in-depth understanding of human experience (van Aalst, 2013, p. 28). According to McLeod (2001) the growing interest shown by counsellors and psychotherapists in qualitative methods of inquiry is not accidental or mere fashion, rather the increased attention being paid to qualitative research reflects a basic shift in mental health. Qualitative research, which gives people a voice, which allows their experiences and life stories to be documented, is therefore invaluable to the smooth, efficient, and humane running of human services agencies (McLeod, 2001, p.4). The purpose of this research is explore counsellor students' experiences of development, and because of this the information is better gained from using a qualitative approach.

McLeod (1999) notes that the key idea of qualitative research is one of uncovering or illuminating meaning. What is sought here is to illuminate counsellor students' experiences of development to provide additional information regarding experiences that facilitate their development as a counsellor.



For that, the voice of the participant must be heard clearly, and therefore, qualitative description emanated as an appropriate methodology for this research.

### **3.2.2 Qualitative Description**

This research listens to counsellor students, records their voices, and then communicates their responses. The methodology of this descriptive study remains close to the participants' stories of their experiences so that the inquiry produces a description that provides an insight which is "a complete and valued end product in itself" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 335). With this in mind, I investigated various qualitative approaches to make an informed choice of methodology. Narrative analysis's focus on hearing and exploring the stories of participants was consistent with the research aims; however, its focus on the constructivist role of language and how people tell their stories went beyond the scope of this study. Grounded theory was initially considered for my research because many of the studies on counsellors' professional identity development used this methodology (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003; Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015; Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). But the focus for grounded theory is on generating theory about experiences and it also requires a sample size of 8 to 20 participants (McLeod, 2003), and these requirements are beyond the scope and objectives of the present study. This research thus requires a method that places explicit focus on exploring experience in rich detail, gives voice to counsellor students, and also allows for smaller sample size. A third methodology, qualitative descriptive approach, was subsequently considered.

*Qualitative description* is especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned (i.e. minimally theorised or otherwise transformed or spun) answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers (Sandelowski, 2000, p.337). It is likely to be appropriate for a study such as the current study because, as van Aalst notes, it will enable the voice of participants not to be overly transformed or distorted by well-intentioned interpretation (2013, p.29). Qualitative descriptive studies align with that goal because a highly abstracted interpretation is not being sought

(Sandelowski, 2000). Neergaard et al. (2009) proposed a guide for planning qualitative descriptive research based on Sandelowski's work. These are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Qualitative Description design issues as proposed by Sandelowski*

<b>Design issues</b>	<b>Design specifics</b>
Philosophy	<p>Pragmatic approach</p> <p>Overtones of other qualitative approaches (phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or narrative study)</p>
Sample	Purposeful sampling
Data collection	<p>Minimally-to-moderately structured open-ended interviews with individuals or focus groups</p> <p>Researchers are interested in the who, what, where and why of the experience</p> <p>Review of documents or other pertinent materials</p>
Analysis	<p>Qualitative content analysis using modifiable coding systems that correspond to the data collected</p> <p>Stay close to the data- low level interpretation</p> <p>Goal of the analysis strategy is to understand the latent variable (useful for concept clarification and instrument development)</p>
Outcomes	<p>Straight description of the data organised in a way that fits the data (chronologically by topic, by relevance etc.)</p>

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*Note.* Adapted from Neergaard et al., 2009.

Given the intent of this research, qualitative descriptive research is the most appropriate approach for developing an in-depth understanding of people experience and allowed for the research question to be appropriately explored.

### **3.2.3 Philosophical Orientation**

One of the great strengths of current counselling and psychotherapy research lies in the degree of acceptance of methodological pluralism (Goss & Mearns, 1997). A qualitative descriptive approach, as any with other qualitative approaches, may be inspired of other methods (Neergaard et al., 2009, p.5) and although there is a pragmatic stance underlying this research, based on the criteria in the previous section, there are also overtones of phenomenology because the researcher categorises and clarifies the conversation or interview content that is acquired from participants in a way that remains close to the context, meaning, and significance, as illuminated by the participant.

Sandelowski (2000) states how “the qualitative descriptive study is the method of choice when straight descriptions of phenomena are desired” (p. 339). Although the philosophical writings underpinning phenomenology were beyond the scope of the study, having a phenomenological philosophical orientation in mind allowed researcher to explore the lived experience of the counsellor students and allowed the participants to reveal the source of knowledge regarding their experiences of development.

Because students are influenced by their peers, one-on-one interviews have the advantage of ensuring that an optimal environment is created for the participants to express their experiences of development. This study, therefore, comprises a one one-on-one interview for each participant. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe participant interviews as being a unique expression that is analysed and, when compared, can help to ascertain the inner core. Morrisette (1999) described participant interviews as being not simply “a matter of chunks of information being transmitted between people” but “more accurately, the conversational process is participatory, collaborative and aesthetically rich” (p.3). Gergen (1985) suggested that the focus of the interview should be towards

the world of shared systems of intelligibility and inter-subjectivity. Meaning and truth arise between researcher and co-researchers when a common world of language is formed (Morrisette, 1999, p. 3). As van Aalst notes the text that conveys the inner core should remain undistorted and true to each participant (2013, p.31).

Given the aims of this research, a qualitative descriptive research with overtones of phenomenology is a perfect fit for the project because this methodology allows researcher to extract data concerning the experience of development in a manner that would be most advantageous to the theme being explored. The influence of this methodology allowed the researcher to investigate and describe experiences by staying close to each student's voice.

### **3.2.4 Rigour and Credibility**

In accordance with Marshall and Rossman (1995) research rigour is increased when using a sampling strategy that is congruent with the methodology. Appropriately, and embracing a qualitative descriptive approach, a purposive sampling was used to select the research participants. The benefit of using purposive sampling is the selection of individuals or groups who are deemed "information rich" for the purpose of the study (Sandeslowski, 2000, p.338). The data collection will be participant-driven with open questions designed to allow the participant to define experiences of importance to them and raw data, in the form of direct quotes from participants, are presented to ensure the accurate portrayal of participant voice and perceptions (van Aalst, 2013. p.32).

To have a research that is "knowledge generating" (Morse 1994, p.116) and which achieves high level of rigour and credibility, techniques as based on Milne and Oberle (2005) are applied in this research. These are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2.*****Strategies to enhance rigour and credibility in qualitative descriptive research***

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Techniques</b>
Authenticity	The informants are free to speak Purposeful, flexible sampling Participant-driven data collection The informants voices are heard Promoting richness rather than superficiality of data Conducting focus group interviews to diminish the role of researcher Informants' perceptions are accurately represented Accurate transcription Content analysis (ensuring data-driven coding and categorising)
Credibility	Capturing and portraying a truly insider perspective
Criticality	Reflection on critical appraisal applied to every research decision
Integrity	Reflecting on research bias Dual role (clinician/researcher/interviewer) during the interview Dual role in the process of analysing Informants' validations/member checking Peer review/researcher triangulation

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*Note.* As proposed by Milne et al. 2005.

Because the aim of this research is to understand and explore each individual person's story and experience to gain a greater understanding of development, participants will be interviewed one-on-one rather than in focus groups. Focus group interviews would diminish the individual perspective and may encourage oversimplification of this distinct group of people's experience. Apart from that, the major techniques for an authentic study (from Table 2) will all be captured in this research.

### **3.3 Research Objectives**

To reveal the voices of counsellor students within the context of exploring their development as it is experienced by them, the research objectives are to provide:

- An understanding and description of what the experiences of development are from the viewpoint of undergraduate counsellor students.
- Exploration of the questions: (a) What experiences and conditions do undergraduate counsellor students perceive as contributing to their development? (b) How do undergraduate counsellor students' use their own experiences towards their development during their programme of study?

Sandelowski (1997) states “the goal of qualitative inquiry is not the mere accumulation of information, but rather the transformation of understanding” (p.128). By gaining multiple perspectives of the experiences of development, undergraduate counsellor students and counsellor educators have more information which can transform previous ideas into new understandings. From this transformation of ideas there can be a better understanding of the issues and that can then be used to create more beneficial education surrounding counsellor development. By establishing these factors future counsellor students and counselling education can benefit from enhanced knowledge that best foster student development.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues arise in social research as it necessitates the collection of data “from people, about people” (Punch, 2005, p.276). According to Punch, qualitative research intrudes into individuals' lives and this it is the reason researchers must ensure the rights, privacy, and wellbeing of the people they study.

Ethics approval was sought, because the researcher acknowledges her responsibilities to adhere to ethical principles as they pertain to the participants and to research integrity. In adhering to ethics protocol, ethical consent for this research was gained from the University of Canterbury (UC). (Appendix B). In addition, a Maori Consultation form was completed and advice sought in relation to engagement with Maori (refer to Appendix C: e-mail of support from Ngai Tahu Consultation and Engagement Group). Maori are not being selected as a specific cohort but may be participants; however, I perceive no specific issues around cultural safety and acknowledge the importance and unique value of the Treaty of Waitangi and the implications for Maori in the context of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Principles of ethical conduct outlined by Tolich and Davidson (1999) and Mutch (2005) guided this study. Tolich and Davidson (1999) identified five principles of ethical research: do no harm, voluntary participation, informed consent, avoid deceit, and confidentiality. The researcher is committed to ethical research practice and adhered to these principles, which are discussed in the next section.

*Do no harm:* The central maxim for the ethical researcher is do not harm (Campbell, 2016). In fact, the purpose of this study is to produce the opposite of harm, the purpose here “is to produce evolving understanding and information which may improve the situation of human being” (UC Policy Library, Human Ethics Policy- Research Involving Human Participants). The researcher also focused on participant wellbeing during the interview process and any follow up by beginning each interview with a warm welcome, reiterating confidentiality, having awareness of cultural needs and potential sensitive issues, demonstrating respectful time management, and ending with genuine thanks (Taylor & Francis, 2013). Participants were treated with warmth, respect, and equity. At beginning and end of each interview there was acknowledgement of appreciation, reiteration of privacy and confidentiality, and that the interview would be audio recorded. Flexibility was used and assessment skills applied to each individual to check how they were coping with the interview. Because I hold a BSc (Psychology) and am enrolled in a master of counselling programme, and have 200 hours of face to face counselling sessions, I have the assessment skills and empathy to check a participant’s wellness and I am aware of

respectful engagement. I reminded participant her/his right to withdrawal at any time during the research

*Voluntary participation:* It was anticipated that all participation in this study be voluntary. For me as a researcher, voluntary participation is an essential ethical consideration because it is what fosters respect and equity in the relationship and it is through it that misuse of the power between researcher and participant is avoided. This research opened space for participants' voices to be expressed freely. Withdrawal from the study, with no questions asked and no coercion was possible at any stage in the process.

*Informed consent:* Informed consent seeks to avoid deception or misinterpretation, as well as preventing psychological harm (Berg, 2001). Participants were fully informed about the purpose and nature of this study, to which they need to indicate consent, in writing, before taking part.

Once expressions of interest were obtained the information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D) were sent by e-mail, so that participants could read and understand the whole process and have the opportunity to seek further information, and understand the right to and process of withdrawal from the project. Researcher allowed time for the participants to read through the participant information sheet, answering any questions that arose and informing participants their right to withdraw from this study or to withdraw the complete or in part of any information they provided until a certain point of the research. When participants stated they understood the information presented to them, they were asked to sign the consent form

*Avoid deceit:* Participants were given accurate and clear information in relation to all of the aspects of this research. All information regarding this study was fully disclosed to the participants prior to the commencement of the study. If participants had any questions, the researcher answered them with transparency and honesty. They were also clearly directed to the contact means of any official contact persons overseeing this study if they need to raise any concerns.

*Confidentiality:* Confidentiality is an important ethical issue in qualitative research because it



is important that the identities of the participants are guarded (Berg, 2001). The researcher acknowledges that confidentiality is very important in research. This research addresses the issue of confidentiality by keeping information secure and by using pseudonyms for the participants. All participants were offered individual interviews in a private place to maintain confidentiality. The direct data from the interviews was only seen by the researcher and is kept in a locked cabinet. An individual code and pseudonym was assigned to each transcript and used throughout the project. All identifying data was removed from the transcriptions and rechecked by researcher, then offered to participants to review their own transcript. All forms of identifying data is being stored separately in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and all electronic transcripts are on a password protected computer. Raw data will be stored in the University of Canterbury School Of Health Sciences Archives. The raw data and consent forms will be secured in an envelope with ethical approval code and date to be destroyed (five years after completion of study; e.g. February, 2024) on the outside. This will be given to the administrator to be filed on completion of the project. As per HEC principles, data will be held securely for 5 years and then destroyed.

### **3.5 Methods**

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways by which we try to understand our fellow human beings (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 61). It can emerge as an example of a negotiated content that aims to validate and communicate the interviewee voice. Lofland, J., and Lofland, L. (1995) define interviewing as “a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis” (p.18). According to May (2001) interviews capture rich insights into the experiences, opinions, and feelings of the participants. The use of interviews to collect information from participants is appropriate when the researcher wishes to investigate emotions, experiences, and feelings rather than more factual matters because they need to be explored, rather than simply reported (Descombe, 1998). I decided to use the interview method in my research

because the data to be collected is based on experiences of counsellor students and therefore it is the most appropriate technique to adopt.

Semi-structured interviews will be utilised as it allows the researcher to utilise a standard format and have control over the questions asked, but subsequently seek clarification and elaboration on the answers given (May, 2001). Participants have the opportunity to speak freely during their interview; semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to capture the participants' story without researcher bias, participants can tell their story and share as much as they feel comfortable to share. Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to investigate for more information, or ask for clarification, when necessary, but otherwise the data collection is participant driven. The investigation for further information and further clarification gives the data richness because the understanding of the phenomena can be deeper. To ensure validity, authenticity, and credibility of the interviews, participants will be given the opportunity to read through the written transcript of their interview, making any changes so it accurately represents what was said and meant.

### **3.5.1 Selection and Sampling**

Sampling refers to the selection of research participants, who represent the population to be investigated, to make inferences about that population (Berg, 2001). According to Polit and Beck (2005) naturalistic methods of inquiry attempt to deal with the issue of human complexity by exploring directly. The method of choice for the researcher to recruit participants for this research is by purposeful sampling. Merriam (2009) describes purposive sampling as "based on the assumption that researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.77). Kelly (2010, p.317) states that judgement or purposeful sampling is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information and that the researcher may use a set of eligibility criteria to define the research population. The aim of the selection is to sample participants with specific knowledge valuable to answer the research questions and for this reason it includes recruiting participants because of their special experience and

competence, in this instance the participants' experiences of development while in counselling training. Tham (2005) indicates that purposeful sampling "occurs when the researcher selects people who have the required status or experience or are endowed with special knowledge to provide researcher with the vital information" (p.182). All the participants in this research have the experience and knowledge of being an undergraduate counselling student, and thus held the vital information sought.

For Sandelowski (1995), the adequacy of sample size is relative in qualitative research. Davidson and Tolich (1999) state that qualitative methods do not emphasise representativeness in selecting a sample and that is because "qualitative research does not seek to generalise to the whole population but to provide a precise description of what people said or did in a particular research location" (p.34). Sample size in qualitative research does not strive for statistical adequacy to the interview technique, the quality of the information collected, the population from which the samples are drawn, and the intended use of data (Kelly, 2010). Because of this, rather than a sample being drawn from probability theory, which includes random selection of participants, a qualitative researcher selects from essential and typical units and any generalisations are then based on typical cases (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). The intention here was to interview between four and eight undergraduate counsellor students in training, as rich descriptive data can be obtained with small numbers of participants.

### **3.5.2 Eligibility Criteria**

As recommended by Berg (2001), the participants selected needed to show particular characteristics of a population that was interested in the research question, therefore, the research aimed at counselling students.

Inclusion criteria to participate included:

- Undergraduate counsellor students with, at least, one year of experience in counsellor education.

- Aiming to gain “localised, personal accounts from people who have experienced a particular phenomenon and are willing to speak about it” (Taylor & Francis, 2013, pg.191) participants will be self-selecting. So the second criterion is that participants indicate willingness, after reading the information sheet, to be involved. Tremblay (1975) writes key informants may be chosen according to the criteria such as willingness and ability to communicate or cooperate, and impartiality: in other words they are good interview subjects. Hence, the participants will be volunteers and the option of withdrawing, without any negative impact, will be reiterated at the time of the interview. Participants will be made fully aware of the nature of research; prior to the interview should they have any questions to clarify so that they can make an informed decision (see Appendix C).

### **3.5.3 Recruitment**

Initially I as the researcher contacted via e-mail organisations that offer the counselling undergraduate programme and asked them to forward an e-mail announcing the research opportunity to students. The students interested were asked to contact me for further details of the study. A poster was also put on notice boards. Once contacted, further information was forwarded by e-mail that outlined a description of the study, selection criteria, and researcher’s contact information. A meeting or telephone call was made to discuss and answer any questions before a consent form was signed. If recruitment numbers were higher than eight, all potential participants would have been kept active and informed until interviews times were set to offset the possibility of another participant’s circumstances changing and a consequent withdrawal from the project. If the numbers had been lower than five then a follow up e-mail would have been sent. The researcher made it clear that there was no compulsion to participate and anyone could choose to not participate or could have withdrawn until the date the data were analysed.

A challenge faced by the researcher is that although research systematically followed the methodology of recruiting participants and was expecting to have the whole process done in two

months; it took around six months for this study to recruit all the participants. Recruitment started at the end of the year, a period when most of students are busy with assignments and with other end of the year commitments, which might have been one of the contributing factors that caused certain delay on the process of recruiting the participants. Researcher encouraged participants who already had been recruited to spread the word around regarding the research which revealed to be very helpful. Research process also suggests that it would be helpful if counselling educators promote and encourage participation of students in research.

### **3.5.4 The Data Collection**

The intention had been to interview between four and eight participants. Four participants showed interest on the research, contacted researcher and were later recruited. Individual in depth one-to-one interviews were conducted by the researcher, who audio recorded them and then transcribed them. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions, related to participants' personal and professional development (see Appendix A). This practice allowed flexibility for exploring and gathering experiential narratives to develop in-depth understanding of real-life events and experiences (van Manen, 1997). The semi-structured interview, sometimes referred as non-directive or in-depth interview, is designed with predetermined questions and/or topic areas in mind (Berg, 2001). The intention of the interview questions in this research was to illuminate undergraduate counsellor students' own descriptions and experiences in their own words. Written notes on observations such as each participant's body language and emotional remarks were made by the researcher.

To promote a safe environment that allowed participants to talk freely about their experiences, interviews were conducted in a quiet private room booked onsite at the University of Canterbury with an "interview in progress" sign on door to avoid disruption. In each instance the environment was mutually agreed on to ensure the safety and privacy of both the participant and the researcher.

Interviews establish a relationship between the researcher and the participants based on trust, respect, and mutual understanding, and this requires a high level of skills and care from the researcher (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005). Semi-structured interviews were used to guide the process while the actual speech events were constantly negotiated and reformulated throughout the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Mishler, 1986). With this in mind, participants were treated with warmth respect, and equity. This study was considered to have a low risk for both researcher and participants, although minor issues could have arisen due to the nature of the study in relation to the experiences of those in undergraduate counselling training. Discomfort was a possibility, depending on the individual participant experiences or views on specific issues raised in the questions. Participants were free to choose whether or not to answer specific questions.

Upon arrival at the interview location, the researcher followed a standard process to open the interview. The first step was to explain the interview procedure and participant's rights. Each participant was reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they have the right to speak freely and did not have to answer questions that they did not feel comfortable with, and also that they could temporarily break from, or terminate the interview, at any stage if they did not wish to continue for any reason. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The participants could then raise questions or request further information they needed before the interview commenced. The researcher used the interview schedule as a guide (Appendix A), which contained the main questions that covered the experiences of development for the participants. Each main question also contained a number of possible follow-up questions to ensure the efficiency of the interview, as well as focusing on the information rich aspects of the participants for in-depth inquiry. The minimum time required for each interview was 60-90 minutes and then later to read the transcription of their interview was an estimated three hours in total. A certificate was produced to each participant for their time given to the research project, so then they might use it in their professional portfolios. All interview data was then arranged and examined by different methods in a comprehensive data analysis process.

### **3.5.5 Transcription**

Once the data had been gathered the audio recordings were transcribed by researcher and this enhanced significantly her engagement with and closeness to the data. This provided study with deeper meaning and the ability to illuminate the essence of the experiences.

The researcher used a naturalistic approach which captured pauses, hesitations, and the cultural use of language, including laughter or idiom (van Aalst, 2013, p.41). Cultural use of language refers to a particular language used by a specific group of people. Interview was transcribed and checked against the audio tape for accuracy. To allow relevant ideas within the data to emerge, transcriptions were shared with participants, which gave the opportunity to the participant to add, revise, or remove any content they desired. Furthermore, the existence of verbatim transcripts allowed later review (Carpenter and Suto, 2008). Verbatim transcription is the process of converting spoken word into text such that a message is captured exactly the way it has been spoken. By reporting the actual words of each participant the interview remained the perspective of the undergraduate counselling student and not the perspective of the researcher.

Participants were offered the opportunity to read through the written transcript of their interview, making any changes so it accurately represented what was said and meant. No participants made any change on the written transcript.

### **3.5.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is defined by Bogden and Bilken (2007) as the systematic process of searching and arranging data accumulated during research to enable the researcher to establish findings. In this descriptive qualitative research, thematic analysis was used to analyse the participants' accounts, which Braun and Clarke (2006, p.81) refer to an essentialist or realistic method. The analysis reported experiences, meaning, and the reality of the participants by "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

The researcher took time to immerse herself in the data, pouring over the texts and continuing the analysis “beyond the point of boredom” (McLeod, 2003, p.41). In the first stage, researcher listened to the recording of the interviews in order to gain an overall sense of the participants’ experiences of development and to understand the latent variable. In the second stage, the transcripts were read for the first time aiming to produce a set of notes and comments on the data, listing general points of interest in the left margin of the printed transcript. In the third and last stage of analysis, by using thematic analysis the researcher could search transcripts for common patterns and identifiable themes that recurred through the transcripts which allowed a data-driven thematic map to emerge. This refers to the visual presentation of themes, codes, and their relationships, involving a detailed account and description of each theme, their criteria, exemplars, and counter examples, and other similar details (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). As one part of data analysis, it helped with reviewing themes and achieved the aim of identifying coherent but distinctive themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than trying to make the results fit previously discovered themes or headings, the participants’ voices were allowed to speak for themselves and then were grouped only by their own content (van Aalst, 2013). Sandelowski (2000) suggests “the description in qualitative descriptive studies entails the presentation of the facts of the case in everyday language” (p. 336) as opposed to other methodologies which may require the researcher to change the language or text to permit further interpretation. For this reason the intention was to gather a substantial amount of data to capture insights into experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students while in training. The descriptive approach is indeed less interpretive than it is descriptive, thus not requiring researchers to move too far away from their data (Sandelowski, 2000). This does not require the researchers to agree with each other’s point of view but researcher seeks descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992). The descriptive approach only requires interpretations that are low-inference (Sandelowski, 2000). Descriptive validity comes from accurately describing the events or experiences from the participants’ interviews.

The descriptive approach does not require the researcher to explain the data in terms of conceptual, philosophical, or other highly abstract framework or system (Sandelowski, 2000), but rather, to



document with accuracy and to summarise events in the everyday terms of those events (Sandelowski, 2000). In this study, the majority of data collected has concerned with actual life experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students. Unique, but atypical or minority, data entry was retained and given equal weighting and attention instead of being fed into a model, submerged in the trend of the majority, or excluded as outlier in the generalisation process (Wangi, 2011, p. 32). Any interpretation is low-inference, meaning the reader does not have to read between the lines, and thus the findings result in the likelihood of a consensus amongst the readership (Sandelowski, 2000). The stories of experiences may present as “ambiguous, complex and multiple forms” (Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 380) whereas the characteristics that descriptive inquiry conveys interprets these data as it shows itself.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology on which this research is based and described the methods applied. The focus of the methodology and methods that was used in this research was to clearly hear the participants’ voices about their experiences of development while in training.

A qualitative descriptive approach emerged as being the most appropriate approach for developing an in-depth understanding of these experiences of development and for allowing the research question to be appropriately explored. Data were collected directly from the participants and purposeful sampling along with criterion sampling of inclusion and exclusion were applied. In total four participants were interviewed for the data collection process. Data driven semi-structured interviews were used to allow the researcher to capture the participants’ story without researcher bias. During this stage, individual in depth one-to-one interviews were conducted and audio recorded. Once the data had been gathered the data were transcribed by researcher, which enhanced significantly her engagement and closeness with the data. This chapter also gives special attention to ethical considerations because the researcher acknowledges her responsibilities to adhere to ethical principles as they pertain to the participants and research integrity. The next chapter focuses on what emerged from the data. It is a chapter about

hearing and illuminating the voices of the participants and it reveals the analysis and results of this research.

## Chapter 4: Hearing and Illuminating the voices: Analysis and Results

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*“I take no action and the people are transformed of themselves;*

*I prefer stillness and the people are rectified of themselves;*

*I am not meddlesome and the people prosper of themselves;*

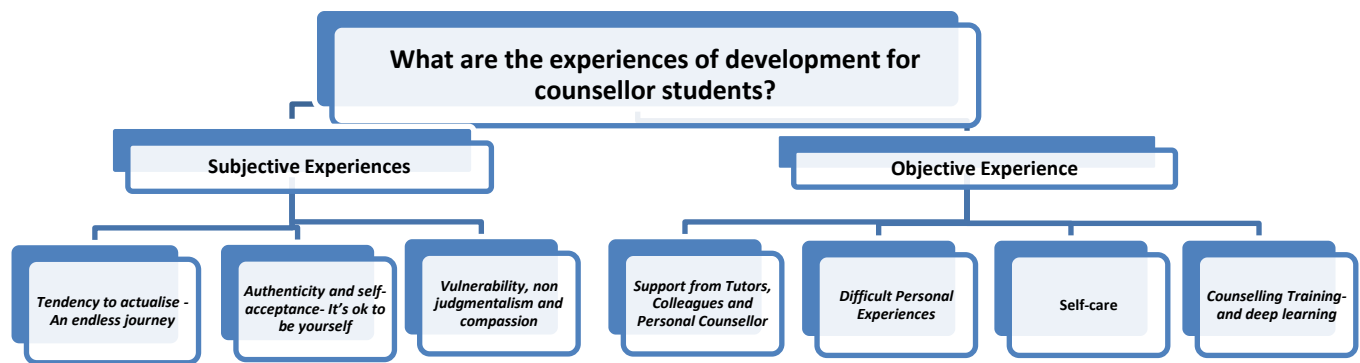
*I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block.”*

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu (551–479 BC) translated by D. C. Lau (1963)

### 4.1 Introduction

This purpose of this research project is to illuminate undergraduate counsellor students’ voices and to increase knowledge about their experiences of development. The data emerged by attentive listening and by promoting a safe space where participants could express themselves freely. Participants spoke about their own meaningful experiences of development during their inspiring journey of becoming a counsellor.

The researcher transcribed the interviews, then searched the transcripts for common experiences and identifiable themes that recurred, and then grouped the data by content into emerging themes. The two most prevalent themes were, as can be seen in diagrammatic form in Figure 1: Subjective Experiences and Objective Experiences. Several subthemes emerged from the themes. The subthemes of Subjective Experiences were: tendency to actualise; authenticity and self-acceptance; vulnerability, non-judgmentalism, and compassion. The subthemes of Objective Experiences were: support from tutors and colleagues, difficult personal experiences, self-care, and counselling training.



**Figure 1.** Undergraduate counsellor students’ experiences of development, by theme and sub-theme

## 4.2 Subjective Experiences

Subjective Experiences emerged as a major theme in the undergraduate counsellor experience of development. Every participant made comments on their tendency to actualise; authenticity and self-acceptance; and vulnerability, non-judgmentalism, and compassion. These subthemes are explored below.

### 4.2.1 Tendency to actualise- An endless journey

*“Once the process started I couldn't stop it, I didn't want to stop it! I've seen too many good things happening.”(Rocky)*

All of the participants interviewed commented on their own endless process of becoming a counsellor and their own experiences of development. They all describe their development as being a continuous and as a lifelong journey where they are guided by their tendency to actualise and learn. The tendency to actualise and intense commitment to develop was noted in a number of studies and then as Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003, p.30) noted in their qualitative study “most of our informants, whether students or practioners, impressed us [the authors] with an attitude of reflective awareness and an

eagerness to learn and develop”. Orlinsky et al.’s (1999) research exposed survey responses of counsellors with two or more decades of professional experience and they also reported a sense of continuous development characterised by experiences of improving, becoming skilful, and feeling a growing sense of enthusiasm about the profession. For them a counsellor’s “sense of currently experienced growth reflects a renewal of the morale and motivation needed to practice therapy, a replenishment of the energy and refreshing of the acumen demanded by therapeutic work” (p.212). For Rogers (1961), the organism has one basic tendency and striving- to actualise, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism (Rogers, 1961, p.487). An example from within this study is Anna, who stated that there is always this tendency and striving to learn, to grow and to heal:

*I think I’ve learnt that I wasn’t as healed as I thought I was... Because I’ve done a lot of counselling before, I went into the course going “Right! I’ve done all my personal counselling, I’ve healed all my issues from the past, and I’m ready! Then I got in there and kind of went “wow! There still a lot more things in there that I still need to heal! So ... I think probably the biggest learning is that we always healing and we always growing... you know... There will be always something new that comes up that may bring something else from the past or may just be a new issue that comes up... and there is always learning and always growing... always healing to do (Anna).*

She further explained her experience of continuous development and her eagerness to “keep pushing it up”:

*I feel like I’m growing. Back in the past, I’ve raised my sons by myself. So I’ve always been solo and always struggled with money. So when you’re in that and you can’t see “this is just how it is going to be my life”, “this is going to be how it is”... But I know I kind of come along and go “Right!” I’m doing this not only for me but for my children even though they probably will be left home by the time I finish... Still to show them that pretty much all beyond any adversity you can have your dream, you can work hard, do what you want to do... you know? We just gotta keep growing, keep pushing it up (Anna).*

She stated that “*there is always learning and always growing to do*” and that “*we just gotta keep growing, keep pushing it up*”. Similarly, Beatrice remarked about her experience of endless development:

*Counsellors like to call it “learning edges” rather than “this is what you did wrong, this is what you need growing!”[Laughs]... I’m not going to have everything sorted out until... On my death bed and I’ll go “that’s ok, that’s enough”... You know?” (Beatrice).*

She complemented the idea of continuous learning and revealed her hope for further development:

*I hope I will be always learning. I hope I’ll never think that I have it all together, that I know people, I hope I’ll never look at people and say “that’s what they are going through and that’s why they feel that way”, you know? I want to be like “what does it mean for them?”, or “what’s your experience?” We might have gone through the same experience but your experience might be different, possibly (Beatrice).*

The tendency to develop the self is a constant process of being and becoming (Tudor, Keith, Valentine, and Worrall,2004), which concurs with Barnett (2007, p.269)when he suggested that the counsellor’s development “can be better understood with hindsight and professional maturity” and because of this it is an endless process. It seems as if counsellors’ experiences of development are associated with “the organism’s tendency to actualise” (Tudor et al.2004, p.27). All the participants had what Barnett (2007, p.257) identified as an “unconscious motivation”, and which Sanders (2006, p.28) called an “unconscious strive for new experiences”, and Merry (2002) described as “along with an unspoken desire to grow as a person and work towards my full potential”. Likewise, in this project, Lucy stated:

*Yeah... I still doubt myself but I think I’m in the right track and I think even if the fruits are not quite there yet I feel like what I’m doing inside myself will eventually translate as being a good counsellor. Even if I still ask the wrong questions and don’t always follow the guide lines for therapy... I think I’m on the right track but it’s definitely a total wrestle with*

*wanting security sitting in the uncertainty... I'll never going to be an expert! Apparently...  
I'll never know enough, just need to be ok with that (Lucy).*

For Lucy, becoming a good counsellor involves a lifelong process of development and counsellors are always on the process of becoming expert and never can consider themselves experts because there are always a lot to learn, for example the ability to trust self, cope and deal with things like the uncertainty of life. Baltes and Smith (1990, p.95) see “uncertainty” as one of the major criteria for the development of “knowledge about the relative indeterminacy and unpredictability of life and ways to manage”. As well as acquiring knowledge and skills, counsellors need to learn how to wrestle with uncertainty and be able to go into the unknown as they follow their clients into new spaces (Fraser, 2008). For example, Lucy stated:

*I suppose it is like surrounding control of security in a way, I think the whole profession it can never feel like you're like an expert ... with a client you don't know what's going to happen in the next hour... You don't have like things you can hide behind... and if you do, you sort of feel like 'I just use that to protect myself' you know... so it's learning to trust myself, trust my ability to cope and to deal with things as they come up but without trying to protect and control so much my environment... I have this line that I like and it's like 'abandoning my addiction to the certainty of life' you know (Lucy).*

Beatrice's voice similarly illuminates her wrestle with uncertainty and her thinking about “abandoning the addiction to the certainty of life”. During her interview, she mentioned the same ideas Lucy:

*There is a beautiful line of a song that means a lot to me and it says 'I abandoned my addiction to the certainty of life'... I was listening to it on my way here [to the interview]... So that one 'abandoning my addiction to the certainty of life', I don't need to know everything, it's so true for me! I realised with my desire for growth, I wanted to know what's around every corner, I wanted to know what was coming to me so I could be prepared to grow and be fully equipped with everything around every single corner,*

*because I was so afraid of being caught out of guard... So afraid that what if the thing around the corner makes me look foolish? You know? Sitting with a client and having nothing to say... And not knowing where to go with the client... Just sitting on that unknown and being more comfortable with whom I am and everything that I have is enough and trusting the process... Trusting that I don't need to know everything. Life is uncertain...Of course I continuous to learn more things... I was not as comfortable and now through 'being thrown in the deep end', being in the placement and having to practice counselling showed me that's ok, when you're counselling someone you don't know what's around the corner, you don't know what's going to happen (Beatrice).*

From the beginning of the interview to throughout the end, the unrestrained drive towards self enhancement and continuous development was a common theme discussed by all the participants.

#### **4.2.2 Authenticity and Self-acceptance**

*"Not to be afraid of the response. Now I don't elevate what they think about me over what I think about me, you know? Now it doesn't matter! I'm fine!"(Beatrice)*

The experiences of authenticity and self-acceptance seem to be considered by all participants as an important factor in their own journey of development. Authenticity implies becoming and being faithful to one's true self, with a refusal to live according to an externally prescribed life plan to ensure that one achieves happiness and fulfilment (Reisert, 2000, p.307). For Rogers (1961, p.163) "the deepest responsibility of man is to will to be that self which one truly is" and therefore it is alright to be that self that one authentically is. This experience could be followed by positive feelings towards valuing and accepting self, for example, from my research:

*I've got more confidence in myself as well. Because I've never had much confidence in myself so yeah... as I said before just 'I'm ok! I'm ok as me.' I've never felt this way before in my life! This is a really huge thing. (Anna)*



Beatrice also expressed the importance of authenticity and self-acceptance:

*Trusting myself, I think it's a big thing, learning how to value myself and not push away desires or things that come up on me and trusting that there is a reason for them. And not be afraid of the response. Now I don't elevate what they think about me over what I think about me, you know? Now it doesn't matter! I'm fine! The confidence that comes with it.*

To say of an individual that he is authentic would mean that the particular individual truly represents himself (Guignon, 2008, p 277). It seems to be a spontaneous process where participants' authenticity flourishes above the imperatives of life (family, friends, society, etc.) and where their true expression of self is illuminated, recognising "that the only question which matters is 'Am I living in a way which is deeply satisfying to me and which truly expresses me?'" (Rogers, 1999, p.119). Rocky talked about his experiences of expressing self in an authentic way with his family:

*I became more kind of...more argumentative with my own family and my ex-wife... Before the course I think I had mechanisms in place to keep my anger experiences in check...when I went to study at College and I started reading all the books I was like 'that's me! I had conditional positive regard, conditions of worth—all these kinds of things...I felt so validated because it gave me a label to what I was feeling...label...I had the words—I had experienced these conditions and gone through them. I got right into it...I thought when I went home I couldn't just turn it off...and I said critical things and it felt good but...I gave my mum a very hard time...she kept saying "Rocky is losing it all the time..." and I just felt like all the things I wanted to say I would say—like "Why do you say this?"; "You're so critical"; "You're negative!"; "You've never said anything about my inner person"; "You've never acknowledged that there was stuff in here"... And of course at college they put their emphasis on your inner experiences, the processes and what you're feeling and all that kind of thing.*

Beatrice also noticed that she's been also expressing herself in a more authentic way with her family:

*Because of my professional development it kind of dribbled into my personal life... Suddenly when I'm with my family... I'll be like 'oh my tone of voice or my body language or my facial expressions towards my mum'... I'll be like 'oh! I feel there was a wee bit of attitude there Beatrice!' and 'what was that about?'*

Continuing with the authenticity theme, Rocky described the process of expressing the self in a more authentic way as “from keeping things in, to wanting to get things out” and continued, saying:

*You realise when you trained that of course you could go back through some difficult things and different emotions that come up and there is no way around them. You learn about avoidance—you can't avoid them anymore...it doesn't do anything, it just comes back around and it's worse because it sticks behind you and does things...so taking ownership...sometimes it seems like things were worse, actually, a lot of the time. If I brought these things out and have these feelings of anger or whatever it was...it changed from keeping things in to want to get things out and realise the importance of like self-expression and processing emotions... Sometimes things will pop out over the dinner table with my family, things I've never said...I would swear in front of my mother.*

Similarly, Lucy commented:

*Sometimes in my family I noticed myself saying things and I think "wow, that's not my normal role that I'd play here' but... something about me has shifted and sometimes I don't even recognise myself... 'Wow! Did I really just say and feel that?' rather than this sort of, maybe, more childhood response that I would've had.*

By listening to the participants' voice it seems to be that as a result of their own experiences of being authentic (including expressing self authentically) their own experience of self-acceptance was fostered. Merry (2002, p.42) describes the acceptance of self as a “movement towards the ability to recognise introjected values (those adopted from outside oneself), and conditions of worth, and the ability to develop values that are more consistent with the basic organismic valuing system”. So, through the experience of accepting the self there is a movement towards valuing the self more highly.

Rogers (1961, p.87) describes this movement this way: “he actually comes to like himself. This is not bragging or self-assertive liking; it is rather a quiet pleasure of being one’s self”. And he further stated that the person begins to recognise and become dissatisfied with being someone they are not, such as living behind a facade of conformity, denying feelings or wearing a mask of intellectual rationality (Rogers, 1961, p.114). From the participants’ voice it was heard that they all reported an increase in authenticity and self-acceptance since they started counselling training. They all expressed that, for them, ‘it is ok’ to be themselves but ‘it is not ok’ not to be their own self anymore. Lucy explained:

*It’s ok to take care of myself and actually I am more sensitive than I am giving credit for. Before I was like ‘that’s not a big deal, just get over it’ but now I am more like ‘yes, that’s really touching me and I actually need to do something for myself’. So being reminded by others but also just with that authenticity thing, I realised I’m kind of lying if I can feel a little bit of ‘no, I’m not doing that’ or ‘I’m not ok with that’ and feels a little bit inauthentic now to do the opposite.*

Beatrice also acknowledges the importance of being authentic and congruent:

*Even though I’m growing as a professional, if doesn’t line up with who I am authentically and been actually a reflection of who I am as a person, I don’t want to! You know? I just want to be so congruent with whom I am and flow with who I am.*

Self-acceptance means facing up and accepting all the peculiarities of self, the flattering and the less comfortable aspects of self, including the *good* and the *bad*, the *beautiful* and the *ugly*, the *light* and the *shadow* within all of us. From the participants voice was heard that authenticity moves the self towards self-acceptance which then works to unify all parts of the being into a new whole integrated and accepted self. Rocky expressed his perceptions of authenticity and his own process of accepting and integrating whole self:

*Becoming more authentic, more energy, less anxiety...you have the good and the bad now...there are some parts that start to come out that you don't like of yourself.. .Learning to accept that we're good and we're bad, we're beautiful and we're ugly... all these things,*

*whatever you bring out it's safe to bring it out and it's okay...given enough time and relationship you can really learn how to put yourself back together and that the whole of you it's okay. Then you get strong again inside. Like a child you have access to everything, you're just integrated...I think that was the new thing, the integration and with integration comes energy and strength and power because you're functioning as a whole. You're not cut off. Because it takes energy to be cut off, holding things takes energy...yes!*

Beatrice also expressed *being ok with self* and the importance of accepting *the shadow side* of it:

*Now I'm ok with myself. I've accepted my own... I supposed people might call it 'ugly parts' or whatever, I wouldn't necessarily call it ugly... Maybe once upon a time I would of but now... Some people refer to it as shadow side you know.*

Rocky further provided a good example of this theme:

*There is a part of me, who fears who I am and tries to be who I think I should be. There is who I actually am: which plays out in reality in the way I talk and the things I do, and this battles with who I think I should be. The course helps you understand all these things in the reality of my mind but you gotta test it out there to see if matches up. Sometimes it's not as bad as you think. Yeah... becoming aware of the old thinking I guess... I think a very important thing is not only the acceptance but also the forgiveness. Forgiveness for not measuring up to yourself and then engaging in a new process of restoration and self-talk, you gotta create new dialogues in your mind, a new foundation. The old will always be there. You can't take the past away, you can't dissolve it, and you can't deny it... you still have to acknowledge this part of you...say the negativity, or the anger, or the critical, all those things...to do what some Ancient culture do, like keep building new structures on top of the old ones...practice of the positive self talk and learning how to reassure yourself...to me this is so vast, because I mean you're talking about the human soul—you're talking about the human mind...it is such an amazing thing... I don't know if you believe in evolution or if you believe in creation but either way, I mean, this mind, this machinery that*

*we live in, all the memories, they are all right through your body—body awareness and your body speaks to you beyond the verbal...so many subtle things...I began to realise that despite of what I've been told, we're amazing, we all are!*

Rogers (1961, p.110) states that “the person exists only in response to the demands of others, that he seems to have no self of his own, that he is only trying to think and feel, and behave in the way that others believe he ought to think, and feel and behave... he is guided by what he thinks he should be, not by what he is.” The experience of becoming more authentic is moving away from *ought's* and other imperatives imposed by our own self, others or society. For example, Lucy also explained:

*If I'm ever talking to a friend now and they are talking about something I no longer use 'should'... I just see advice as useless... Sometimes if they ask for it I would... I'm really sold on the idea that advice is not helpful...I have less tolerance now for people who do give advice to me or if I find friends subtly trying to bring their own baggage into... I feel like I have less tolerance... I'm not like "Oh, yeah, yeah..." and I'm like, now I can say to them "oh no, this is not helpful". So, that's nice!*

Similarly, Anna commented:

*It's really hard to do it first... to look into yourself in that way... Now I came out of it and realised how much I've learned about myself and I just feel more centred. That's probably more settled in myself like... I'm ok! I am ok as I am. Rather than 'I should be this or I should be that'. Now I can kind of sit back and 'hey, I'm all right, I'm ok!' You know, the person that I am is ok.*

Rocky's voice complemented these with the following words:

*Part of me that was feeling unaccepted, unworthy, small, not valuable...that part had been brought out and looked at, and I felt 'that's ok! That's a part of you that's valuable! You can have it back.' So it got put back into me with value and love, I mean, I have that part now...It was like replacing a damaged part in a vehicle. I was suddenly working better. I*

*thought 'that's what it is.' And so, that was part of the 'new' I'm talking about. Um...the 'new' is like more of a sense of like, it's ok to be natural and authentic. Not more feeling like 'ok, you gotta try to be this or be that which you're not. 'It's ok to be you, kind of thing.*

Anna's voice continued with the theme and gave another good example:

*We've got this lady in our class and she's always been an A+ student and she puts this high pressure on herself and so now she's started to learn 'hey, a B still a pass and it's ok to get a B.' You know, but she had this full pressure on her for the whole of last year 'I must be up here', 'I must succeed up here', but now she is starting to realised that it's ok. And that's just one example of the pressure we put in ourselves that comes from the outside world. 'I must be this' or 'I must' you know? Yeah, I've got to the point that I'm ok as I am. And then of course, goes into the professional development, where I'm sitting with a client and I'm not worried about what they are thinking 'she's got wrinkles', 'her hair is grey'... I'm not worried about what the client thinks about me because I'm there because of the client so I can let that stuff just go.*

For Harter (2002, p. 382), authenticity refers to “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs” and further implies that “one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings”. People can generally distinguish sincere from deceptive emotional displays (Ekman, 2001,2003;Ekman & O’Sullivan, 1991;Ekman, O’Sullivan, & Frank, 1999). According to Frank, Ekman and Friesen (1993), observers can detect authenticity of emotional expressions, and react negatively to inauthentic displays. As Gross and John (2003) note, detecting untruthful expressions harms the quality of an interpersonal relationship. The subjective experiences of being authentic with own emotions, to be real emotionally was also illuminated by participants. Beatrice expressed this theme in the following way:

*Suddenly it was like, 'I don't need to give over everything', 'I don't need to think I need to be powerless for this relationship to work'. I was like, people pleasing... Thinking if I agree*

*with everything they say they will accept me, you know? And suddenly be 'actually, no!' I can still be me and it's good for people to learn that too. The whole thing of you can't be fully be with others if you can't be with your own self... So being able to go to those deep places in myself and being able to 'I feel sad, I'm going to cry' and actually being present with my pain, not gouching my teeth and clutching my fists and holding my breath anymore and kind of pushing through. But just breathing and relaxing and being with it... And that's only being able to happen because now I'm ok with myself.*

Rocky also highlighted the importance of being authentic with emotions:

*We were encouraged to be real emotionally. That was the part of the learning process to develop a process for group growth...because you learn over time that it's okay to kind of be more congruent and more authentic—and develop that as a part of your way of being.*

All of the participants' voices expressed their own subjective experiences of authenticity and self-acceptance. It was clearly identified by the participants their journey towards authentic expression of self; towards being authentic with emotions; towards learning to value who they are; it's ok to be own self; and towards moving away from ought's and musts and the others imperatives of life.

#### **4.2.3 Vulnerability, Non-judgmentalism and Compassion**

*"There is humility about it, like growing the sense of that the more you know,  
the less you know" (Lucy).*

Vulnerability has been noted as an important component of growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2008) and it is an aspect of being which is conducive to the development of individuals through openness to experience of self and others (Gray, 1979). In addition, vulnerability may be required of counsellors in order to be as effective as possible with clients (Jordan, 2008). Participants in this research project illuminated these experiences of vulnerability and also covered a number of aspects

that emerged from it, including non-judgmentalism and compassion. The experience of vulnerability suggested to participants that they were fostering their development.

According to Collins (2000, p 71), “We are developing an epistemology of connection versus an epistemology of separation”. Movement out of isolation and into connection first with counsellor, and then with other significant people in the client’s life, represents a successful counselling outcome (Jordan, 2010). In this vein, Storr (1963) points out the need of equal relationships with each other in order to realise oneself full potentialities. In addition to that, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1999, p 93) states that “making oneself vulnerable is an act of trust and respect, as is receiving and honouring the vulnerability of another”. Being vulnerable with others as an act of trust, respect and honour is seen in a number of the statements from participants. While vulnerability has not been defined as such by the participants, it is revealed in some of their experiences.

Vulnerability can be an act of trust and respect where selves are allowed not to be defended. The expectation of a critical response, often parentally programmed into us, is at the heart of what vulnerability is about: to be vulnerable is not to be defended (Gray, 1979). There is always a complete freedom from any type of moral or diagnostic evaluation, since all such evaluations are always threatening (Rogers, 1961, p.34). Perhaps because of this freedom, the experience of allowing selves not to be defended and actually flowing with the river of being vulnerable was a significant and challenging experience to the participants in this research project. The threat of critical response and being defended was seen as being part of the experience of being vulnerable by the participants.

Rocky discussed how he benefited from allowing the self to experience vulnerability without being defended. He openly described an experience of one of his assignments where he was evaluated by three counsellors and that influenced him positively. The following comment from him provides a meaningful insight on this experience of development where he talked about taking the risks and consequences of being vulnerable:

*So, that day of my assessment, I had a really hard time, a really bad morning and I was really, really, anxious, really nervous, really scared and then I thought oh no! I'm at school*



*again. Anyway, I did this assessment and I couldn't fake it, of course. They could see right through me. I was scared, I was shitting myself and yeah...still bringing up stuff now...but the difference was I think I knew they were great people, and experienced, loving and supportive and all that kind of thing, my heart just couldn't get it, I was kind of expecting them to criticise me. Coming through a lot of criticism, particularly as a man, having a father who was very tough so when you show these emotions you get criticised, you get attacked, so that's what I was expecting at a conscious level right! So I was ready for the— 'you should have done! You should have prepared! You shouldn't have done'—I was expecting to be criticised. So what happened was that took me into a place I was vulnerable, it was deep, that I wouldn't normally bring up, but because of the circumstances, the context—that squeezed it out of me. So, that was actually a good thing because it came out and the three psychotherapists said, "I appreciate your vulnerability. That must be difficult." They all just held me emotionally. At the time I was still upset because they didn't pass me and I thought oh, ok, that sucks! But I didn't realise the healing that was happening until a day or two later...and I came back to college and I felt like something deep inside had kind of been touched and/or tweaked somehow, I was changed.*

To be vulnerable without defending the self is necessary to trust in the relationship, hence, is necessary to trust that the self will not receive a critical response for being vulnerable. Rogers's (1992) primary concern was for the effects of critical response on the therapeutic relationship. For him, it would undermine the experience of trust between the partners in a therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1992). All the participants in my study mentioned that during counselling training they are invited to reflect on their own critical response and to, as Winslade (2013) puts it, "pass judgment on the judgments that have been working over them". Rocky explained his process of passing judgment on the judgment that has been working over him:

*There is a certain thought pattern that goes on that tells me 'ok, you're feeling insecure because you can't control all these people, you can't know what they're thinking, any one of them can judge or criticise you. But then I found I was judging people as well. I think when*

*I stopped judging myself so much; I stopped judging other people as well...if you're judging other people you're judging yourself as well...everything is like a circle.*

Similar to Rocky's experience, Anna reflected on her own critical judgment on the judgments that have been working over her. Here she states she is developing her ability of non-judgmental attitude and she also expresses her positive feelings about it:

*It's been exciting! I've got a smile in my face! I've never would be able to sit here and talk about myself a few years back because I'd be concerned about you judging me, I would've been concerned I sounded stupid or what I had to say wasn't helpful, or wasn't interesting, you know? So now I'm just... Now I like myself! I've been kinder to myself. I've been kind and forgiven of myself.*

For her it is important to be sitting opposite someone and having no judgments:

*No assumptions, you know, sitting opposite someone and having no assumptions about them, like, 'I've read their files so I know what's going on for them'... you know... Now I read the file like... the outline I guess. But it's not until you actually you sit if that person that you really find out what's going on inside.*

For Rogers non-judgmentalism is exemplified in the attitude of unconditional positive regard which “is at the opposite pole from selective evaluating attitude – ‘you are bad in these ways, good in these’” (Rogers, 1990, p 225). According to Bruhn (2001), forming a relationship with another is emotional experiences that stand in need of “a supportive affirmative working alliance between the helper and the client” (p 54). Positive regard is believed to involve the attributes of warmth, liking, respect, sympathy, love and acceptance (Rogers, 1959b). Counsellors are required to use a level of emotional energy that often underpins a therapeutic relationship and supports a compassionate response and positive regard to the client stories (Corey, 2009), affording an environment in which client does not feel under threat or judged and for that counsellors need to be willing to be vulnerable with clients (Dollarhide 2010; May et al. 1958; Yalom 1980). Anna discussed her ideas regarding adopting a non-judgemental position and positive regard with her clients:

*Every session with a client you always going to learn something about them and if you go on with no assumptions and they feel comfortable they don't need to feel they've been judged. Showing them empathy and unconditional positive regard is... you know... help them to feel safe and that environment so they can explore themselves.*

The willingness to be vulnerable with clients and the adoption of positive regard can lead to compassion. The ability to display compassion is essential in mental health counselling (Bowen & Moore, 2014, p 17) and it requires the counsellor to empathize with the client (Carroll 2001; Figley 2002; Rogers 1980). Compassion is defined as a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another person (Merriam 2002, 2010). Lucy described her experience of becoming more non-judgmental and more compassionate:

*I am Christian but I feel there were there a lot of different beliefs but now I feel like I don't have it anymore like, I can be accepting of the broad spectrum of ideas... Like the other day someone said "I think the earth was created in seven days" and instead of being like 'you're an idiot!' you know, I was able to be like "Ok, interesting! It's good that you have this believe, I disagree, why do you have that belief?" and it's ok, I don't feel like that affect how I see them. I still think that's ridiculous but I don't think they are ridiculous.*

She further explained:

*I feel like I can see more compassion for myself and others... Hum... more considered and more intentional... It's more fun, you know, it's more exciting... There is humility about it, like growing the sense of that the more you know the less you know.*

In a dominant, Western culture that celebrates strength in separation and holds unrealistic expectation for independent, autonomous functioning, vulnerability is seen as a handicap (Jordan, 2008). Beatrice explained below how she used to think about vulnerability and how it shifted since she started the counselling training. Her voice suggested that there is a value in embracing vulnerability (Jordan, 2008):

*So as a young child I think I always wanted to be more vulnerable with people and be part of their vulnerability. I wouldn't ever have these words for it but it was a feeling, you know... And so now in my practice it's been a little bit of getting rid of all those things that I picked up on life and kind of shedding all these stuff that I thought 'this is what will get you through' as being 'tough' and sure but is going to come hand in hand... I'm learning how to accompany things better... 'Being vulnerable' with still 'being not necessarily weak'.*

Courage is ordinarily depicted as a characteristic of the lone, separate person who defies vulnerability and fear (Jordan, 2008, p.211). Further, Beatrice meaningfully explained her views on being vulnerable which doesn't necessarily mean to be weak, actually, for her, being vulnerable has the opposite meaning. Courage also involves building resistance to the radical individualism of the dominant culture, challenging the definitions that are imposed on the less powerful by the more powerful, and importantly, challenging the messages that make the less powerful the problem (Jordan, 2008, p.211). Collins (2000, p.69) notes that "there is a refusal to accept the applied definitions and identities from the dominant group". Below, Beatrice defines vulnerability as being coupled with courage of the lion but also the compassion of the lamb:

*The bible talks about the lion and the lamb... For me, I've seen the lion as the courageous and the really bold and determinate and the lamb as the really compassionate and very sacrificial and willing to sit with you. Now, for me, it looked like that vulnerability coupled with both, there is also a strength that comes in that. I used to think that to be vulnerable means there is no lion, you're all lamb and just all sacrificial, you're all open to suddenly anything anybody said and you can't defend yourself or you can't fully bring yourself into it... And who I am is actually quite a sassy woman! [Giggles] I have a lot of energy and it's learning that's ok and that's actually valuable. Who I am is valued.*

According to Jordan (2010) counsellor vulnerability can be constructive through enabling greater openness to experience of self and others and "if the therapist does not open herself or himself to some impact and change, real growth will probably not occur for the client" (p.105). It was clearly

identified that vulnerability along with non-judgmentalism and compassion are significant subjective experience that impacted various aspects of the participants' development. All the participants in research showed significant willingness to these subjective experiences in order to "[dare] to show up and let ourselves be seen" (Brown, 2012, p.2).

### **4.3 Objective Experiences**

A strong theme amongst those interviewed indicated that objective experiences was a very important experience of development for the participants. Every participant made comments on their objective experiences of: being supported by tutors, colleagues and personal counselling; difficult personal experiences; self-care and putting the self first; and training to be a counsellor. These subthemes are explored next.

#### **4.3.1 Support from Tutors, Colleagues and Personal Counsellor**

*"You're there with people who encourage each other to be open, honest and all that kind of thing, and we're in that environment...it sort of becomes like this new planet, this utopia discovery...like "Wow! That's what I've been missing!" (Rocky)*

*"Everyone in the room there was no judgments, totally acceptance on who you are..."*

(Anna)

One prominent subtheme that emerged from participants' objective experiences was the support they received from tutors, colleagues and personal counsellor. Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss (2014) reported from their qualitative study that "Counsellors at all levels expressed the importance of having a mentor, supervisor, peer supervision or some form of experienced guide to help them in their development" (p.8). Gazzola et al. (2011) explored what the experiences and conditions counsellor students perceived as contributing to their development and the results showed that role models and mentors were one of the categories endorsed by more than half of the participants. In fact, all the

participants in this current research received significant support from tutors, colleagues and personal counsellor whom they stated was especially helpful to their development.

Rocky gained significant support from his tutors and personal counsellor. Rocky felt supported and remarked the importance of experienced guide during counselling training:

*To be more that way [authentic] with a group of people is quite hard at first...it also helps that you could go to your tutors and then talk about things and of, course, having counselling (at least ten sessions) and that was good, very good! Because then you have that space to go every week as well. But also learning that you're not going to suit every client and not every counsellor is going to suit me...but feeling supported is a big thing. Having the experience of being supported in the group with your tutors and having your counsellor and just getting the idea that you're supported.*

Beatrice gained a deep level of trust, connection and support from one of her lecture and offered the following meaningful disclosure:

*I had a moment with a lecture and that was just so beautiful... And I just stood up in the front of class and the whole class had gone out during the break and I was still in the room. My lecturer, she's awesome... I had this feeling she was waiting to acknowledge me because it was my first week back at school [after suicide significant family issue]. So she was just standing there and then I went and stood next to her and without saying anything and I just put my hands on my face and started sobbing and she just put her arm around me and just held me... So beautiful! She didn't do anything else and she didn't say anything, she just put her arm around me and her head touched my head... She just stood there with me while I sobbed and it just felt so like... nurturing... So with this lecturer, she was able to offer me this in that moment. It was so powerful! I just had this overwhelming like 'wow! All these years, suddenly felt like my upbringing, my experiences, my counselling, everything just came into this moment of like 'this is what I longed for'... Just that motherly gentle nurture... that support from her... It was so perfect!*

Likewise, Lucy and Anna also discussed about the support they got from tutors during her training and the benefits of being in a safe place promoted by them:

*It's in a safe place... If anyone else starts to make me feel worse or someone starts to... if I start feeling worst about people's responses the facilitators are able to direct in a healthy and helpful way that is building up rather than making me feel worst. (Lucy)*

*They [tutors] held you as well, like everyone in the room there was no judgments, totally acceptance on who you are... (Anna)*

Anna explained the kind of support she got from her tutors:

*If you got too far, you know, there were people there [College] to hold you and ground you and bring you back down, you know. So it was really, really supportive!*

Participants described further about this objective experience of being encouraged and supported also by their colleagues. Lucy described how her experience of feeling supported by her colleagues and personal counsellor facilitated her willingness to be vulnerable and she also illuminated the positive consequences received from them. She gave the following disclosure:

*The process group, that was a nice support because I could go there and express like "Oh my goodness, I'm so exhausted and how I feel and that's what's going on' and could receive their compassion, gentleness and really nurturing 'oh, you need to look after yourself' without saying that. Hum... and that is as well as personal counselling that I was going to... yeah... so those two things and along with learning this content which is all about listening to your body, all this theories as well was telling me this is what client might be experiencing.*

Likewise, Beatrice commented on the significant and emotional support she got from her colleagues in a specific situation:

*My peers and my group counselling, there were about seven of them in our smaller group, sharing with them and being with my pain, and they were not trying to fix anything, not saying 'isn't it great he [brother] is alive?' and things like that... Just more bearing with the pain and seeing the tears in their eyes... you know... oh! It was strange to actually see someone's response of tears in their eyes and realising 'you're right! This is sad.' Like, because I haven't seen that in my siblings... They hadn't been crying with me and neither had my mum because they all felt 'I gotta be strong!' and 'I'm not strong when I cry', that's their understanding. So just see people you know... These were all adults in our group and some of them have kids... One of them was a male and he had tears in his eyes and I was just like 'what? What am I seeing? How come these people feel for me?' and experiencing that in our group was just... It was the first for me! It felt surreal! Even thinking back on it... It was so powerful in such a humble way. So courageous and so compassionate, you know, for people to have their own tears to be seeing... How do you respond to someone's pain in that way? They were not trying to make me feel better; they were just feeling with me... So, that was massive! That experience suddenly made my whole learning real again.*

A common thread woven among participants' experiences was the shared journey towards counsellor development. They benefited from their shared experiences of supporting one another as they made it clear that they were not going the journey alone. Anna expressed it this way:

*Of course I had my counsellor once a week, there was huge support from the class, from other people in the class because we're all going on the same journey... I mean, different journey but kind of same 'digging deep'...*

A similar perception was noted by Lucy:

*It's a small community at College so... It's a nice little lunchroom... We all sit there and we are all sort of same classes, same time, so it feels like you're forced to get to know one another that till a degree you can no longer feel like "I don't like them anymore" because you start to see the beauty underneath.*



And it was also noticed by Rocky and Lucy:

*The support and encouragement you get in College...it's like you go to College and have a different world with those people. In the first year, I mean you're there three days a week with people who encourage each other to be open, honest and all that kind of thing, and we're in that environment...it sort of becomes like this new planet, this utopia discovery...like "wow! That's what I've been missing!" (Rocky)*

*People that I'm training with; we have a lot of quite deep relationships during lunch time, group process all of that sort of...deepens our understanding of ourselves and others. Giving grace to each other and learning to love one another... (Lucy)*

The experience of being supported by tutors, colleagues, and personal counsellor facilitated participants' development. All the participants benefited from this experience because they indicated that they were guided in meaningful and helpful ways through their experiences during their counselling training. It seems the participants were trained effectively by the support made toward their development.

#### **4.3.2 Difficult Personal Experiences**

*"So it was suddenly just that appreciation for myself, honouring there is a reason why I am sad and there is a reason I want to cry right now and I'm going to do it. Letting it out...*

*Letting it out... And letting it out..." –Beatrice*

It has long been a part of clinical lore that many therapists enter the profession due to their own personal wounds (Henry, 1966). There area great deal of theories and some empirical support for the idea that counsellors development may come, in part, from experiencing and coping with problems in one's own life. (Jackson, 2001) wrote that our own suffering prepares us to appreciate the suffering of others. The therapist's own past or present wounds can facilitate empathic connection with clients and the positive use of counter transferences in therapy (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). It is critical that a

therapist's wounds are mostly healed, or at least understood and processed sufficiently, to prevent them from interfering with therapy and the therapeutic relationship (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). Rocky emphasised how experiencing and coping with difficult family issues had contributed to his development:

*I guess it also depends on where the person is coming from. For me, I come from a background where you keep your feelings to yourself and, particularly for men in New Zealand, you keep your emotions to yourself, you don't wear them on your sleeve...and a man doesn't cry—I've never seen my father cry my whole life!—maybe once, when he was drunk...but so, maybe it was harder for me, because being quite introverted and private I had to also learn to be open to people in new ways...yet I realised there was nothing wrong with being a quiet and introverted but there is no reason why can't you open up when you want to, when you can see the situation as safe. What I learned is that you can be safe in different places and then you can transfer that safety to the counselling space with a client...is that making any sense?*

Anna mentioned traumatic events throughout life but although she did not denominate them, it was clear that they promoted her development:

*I had quite few traumatic events throughout my life, so... hum... going to counselling, personal counselling, for those over for years and then getting into the place where I found I was ready to go into training to be a counsellor... hum... Having a mixture of different counsellors over the years, psychologists and that, kind of gave me an idea of what worked for me and what didn't work for me!*

In contrast, Beatrice's talked specifically about a very difficult experience she went through last year with her family. MSW & Coady (1997) study, examined therapist's beliefs about the development of their helping ability and they found out that difficult personal experiences have a formative influence on them including coping with personal and familial crises. Below, Beatrice describes how coping

with her brother's attempted suicide had fostered her ability to cope with difficult personal experience and to honour herself by being real with her emotions:

*Last year, half way through the year, my youngest brother attempted suicide. So, massive while I'm studying counselling to suddenly this you know... we're learning how to be with people in their pain... It was huge! Thankfully he is alive. Well, I just remember learning from my studies 'my body was going to remember this and it's building up and this all going to come out one way or another down the track so I'm going to honour myself and I'm just going to do it now'. So it was suddenly just that appreciation for myself, honouring there is a reason why I am sad and there is a reason I want to cry right now and I'm going to do it. Letting it out, letting it out and letting it out... Of course I'm sad, my brother is in hospital!*

One prominent theme that emerged spontaneously from all participants' voices is that they broke up intimate relationships during the counselling training. Counselling training can cause significant disruption in the trainee's relationships with their friends and family (Frase, 2008; Nel, 2006). Another study on counsellor students is a qualitative study by Truell (2001) which also noted that trainees' intimate relationships change and sometimes there is a significant amount of conflict. Anna, Rocky, and Lucy shared their experiences of experiencing a relationship break-up. Anna commented:

*And now a point, through all this experience everyone in the class has, we all found out, we all lost friends over the last year... And that's either because we hadn't had the time for them so the friends have just flitted away or because we've realized that a lot of our relationships weren't having the relationships, so we kind of slowly moved away from certain people and move closer towards other people. Just as we are realising 'Hang on! What is this relationship that I am?' Even I've got a friend that I have for... since we were nineteen... and I slowly drifted away from her because I realised that the relationship wasn't healthy. I've never kind of thought about it before but realising how different we are, we're both different parts. I mean, I still have a lot of love for her but the time that I'm*

*not spending with her now it's been very productive time, instead of energy draining time.*

*If we are not receiving energy, we will just burn out. So, that's been interesting.*

Rocky also expressed that he is *going through a separation process at the moment*:

*I'm going through a separation process at the moment and I get a hard time from my ex-wife because there is a language difficulty there...It's a personal issue and I don't want to get into it too much...*

Lucy expressed her relationship break up this way:

*My boyfriend and I broke up the start of this year and I think the idea of being single is really scary, intimidating and uncomfortable... And I think this year I finally got into a place where I was able to break up with him and know that I'm strong enough to be able to cope with all the uncomfortableness and the horrible feelings that I get of being single and that I am not alone. So, somehow I feel this is a brief overview but that's sort of another journey that I can think, thanks for my counselling training thou. I wouldn't be able to do it otherwise.*

It is interesting to note that participants did not convey the sense of having to thoroughly resolve personal and relational issues. Instead, their voices expressed their understanding that development is an ongoing, lifelong process and that sometimes going through personal difficult experiences can promote development.

### 4.3.3 Self-care and Putting Self First

*"Make sure you look after yourself, do something for yourself"(Lucy)*

Self-care and putting the self first were identified as significant experiences of development by the participants. In the light of counsellor experiences, counsellor self-care, defined as the integration of one's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing (Faunce, 1990) becomes an important aspect of counsellors development and in addition, is increasingly perceived as an element of professional ethics (Carroll et. al., 2003). Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996) reinforce the importance of self-care and presented a descriptive 70 item list embracing experiences in the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual and workplace/professional domains. Self-care covers many aspects of people's life and many strategies for self-care have been well documented in the literature such as exercising, sleeping, and eating well, seeking support from other professionals (Eckstein, 2001; Puterbaugh, 2008; Radey & Figley, 2007). In general terms, self-care is the kind of nurturing experience which "gives you a charge" as Rocky discussed his self-care strategies:

*I go to the hills with my son... I do a wee bit of running, I used to do martial arts but I stopped that... hum... Kind of getting out and about I guess...video games...reading and writing... gardening is something else that I enjoy...growing veggies, growing plants inside as well...um... music! Play the recorder and the fife... It's like a flute kind of thing...sometimes go-to the church group, the bible study that was quite good! Because when you get together it's another kind of group...it gives you energy, gives you a charge!*

Although one recent study indicates that counsellor self-care remains hardly ever addressed in counsellor education (Newsome et. al., 2006), this is not what was expressed by the participants' voices in my research. Lucy was reminded many times during counselling education about taking care of herself and she stated that she benefit from it significantly:

*I supposed you get reminded so much to take care of yourself in classes, after lectures or in process group... to take care of yourself. And you get so much compassion from others like "Make sure you look after yourself, do something for yourself" that is sort of overwhelming.*

*You think "oh yeah, maybe I do need to acknowledge that a bit more, like, it's ok to take care of myself and actually I am more sensitive than I am giving myself credit for.*

Anna's counsellor education provider also addressed self-care during training as she stated:

*All about teaching us about burn out and that you can't care for somebody else unless caring for yourself... You went through food, diet and sleep and learning to say 'no'... You know, if an agency is trying to push more work on you that you know you are capable of that you just have to say 'no'... Teaching us all about burn out and the signs of it... hum... emotional and mental...*

Amongst the voices here is the suggestion of self-care and putting the self first that was identified by the participants as important experience in counsellor development. Self-care in the counselling context is not considerate a frivolous or self-indulgent undertaking, but rather a duty to self and to others that promotes safe and effective practice (Beauchemin, 2017). Given similar importance to this issue, Evans and Payne (2007) focused on the articulation of support and self-care of New Zealand counsellors and the integration of these issues into counselling training. The voices in my research suggested that participants' education providers had made significant contribution to the development of self-care during training and the voices also suggested that participants had embraced considerably the experience of self-care and putting the self first. Anna provided a good example of it:

*I came home one day and I'd been at work all day and I was absolutely exhausted and my son walks into the bedroom and went "I need a new art pen, would you go and get me one?" (In a not a nice tone) Normally I'd think 'how selfish! He's been very selfish, he knows how tired I am... hum... you know? That was so rude and disrespectful of him!' But what I was able to do was just park up for a bit and go "Right, now I need to rest." I didn't say it out loud but I said to myself 'Right now I need to rest, something is going on with him but I can't deal with that right now'. So I just, lay down for about half an hour and then I went into him and I said "Right, I'm going down to the supermarket later, you can come with me and get yourself a pen.*

A quote from Lucy reveals similar importance to self-care and the necessity of putting herself first:

*I was living with my sister, her husband and her kids last year...So for me having to witness her [sister] going through that [husband got ill] was super painful but also that was the amongst of me realizing that something was wrong with my body, I hadn't any energy, I would wake up exhausted, be shaky, my legs felt hollow, I got migraine a lot... So it was these two dilemmas and I felt horrible to have to sacrifice one or the other because one I had to witness my sister going through the worst... And then also having to be honest with what I was experiencing and listening to my body and what it was trying to tell me. So that took about six to nine months for me to hear my body enough to acknowledge what it was telling me which is 'no, you can't do that' or 'no, you need to look after yourself'.*

It has been well supported in the literature that in order to be an effective professional, counsellors need to engage in a significant level of self-care. However, individuals in professional counselling and other helping professions spend a great deal of time and energy focusing on others and sometimes they neglect themselves and their own needs (Skolholt, 2001). It is also obvious that one can give only what one's got. If counsellors don't help themselves and neglect self-care, they would not be in advantaged position of helping others and, actually, might have the opposite effect of helping. Neglect of self-care increases occupational risks of harm to self, which can then spread to harm of others (Mailloux, 2014). Anna also discussed the complexity of lack of self-care and how counsellors who keep saying 'yes' and not looking after themselves can get in a stage where they going to crash and will not be able to take on any clients:

*Especially when we know that somebody needs help and you're working in this industry... of course you want to help! But then you gotta to realised that if you just keep saying 'yes' eventually you going to crash and you not going to be able to take in to any client!*

Being a counsellor can be a very psychologically demanding profession because the object of study (the client) can only be understood once counsellors understand themselves. Counsellors use their

own selves as their own tools for our profession. In this sense a counsellor is only able to help or understand others if they too have been able to be helped and understand their own selves. It can be a very challenging journey and one that is deeply affecting. As the participants' voices illuminated, with the process of becoming and being a counsellor, there are positive influences but also negative ones, as it happens with much of life. Counsellors can be affected by burnout, which is defined as the mental and physical exhaustion (Kumar 2011) but can be reversed with changes to one's self-care routine (Weiss, 2004). Lucy describes her experience dealing with burnout and how she was affected by it. It seems that although Lucy got initially affected by burnout, she later transformed her experience of neglecting self to a position of self-care. She was able to turn her initial burnout into positive outcomes such establishing boundaries for her own self and development:

*I'm a lot calmer; I have learned to value myself a lot more. Fatigue was something I was suffering with last year, just doing too much, feeling really stressed if I had to let somebody down... What else? I was over worked, sort of and emotionally and physically so now I have really clear and comfortable boundaries for myself which I don't think I didn't have last year... because now I'm able to value myself more and be more honest with myself and others.*

Participants demonstrated that they have been learning, by their educational provider, a significant level of self-care which they are able to apply into their lives. Wellness as counsellors is inextricably linked to that of the client's, so it is not only for the counsellor that there must be ways to attend to the counsellor's own needs, but for clients as well (Friedman, 2017). Participants' voices revealed that experiences of self-care enhanced counsellor students' development.

#### **4.3.4 Counselling Training and Deep learning**

*"It's an experience of restoration, I guess. I'm just digging into something... something deep...throwing out all these slogans and words...it's big...it's a life changing experience of healing". (Rocky)*



All participants' experience of counselling training study had a profound and liberating impact on how they are in the world. They have been through significant development and learning during counsellor education. Learning theorists believe that differing levels of learning occur and these levels can be characterised as surface and deep learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976). *Surface learning* is a component of the learning process which can be effortlessly forgotten. *Deep learning*, in contrast, relates to the component of learning which cannot be unlearned because once self is aware of it, it cannot be taken away any longer. It is the component of learning which is learned by heart and therefore it becomes part of the self. The concept of the learner being changed as a person by their learning experience is an idea that is central to most adult learning theories, where learning is taken inside the individual and is absorbed in a deep, meaningful way (Fraser, 2008, p.20). Rocky explained:

*Just been willing to engage in new learning... You open your mind to these new ideas, new ways of being with people and relating to people...I guess you need to be willing to examine and stretch yourself mentally with the new ideas. I think, that's really unlike anything...I mean training to be a counsellor, because in classes you bring yourself, you are the course material and for me it was like—the personal challenge of bringing out parts of yourself that perhaps you'd never revealed before in a classroom environment—parts of yourself that you normally kept tucked away and safe. It was kind of risky...you need to be willing to be unpacked; it's hard because you kind of have to lay everything on the table for everybody to see (tutors, colleagues and counsellors) but then you begin to emerge in to a space within yourself where you feel relatively safe and realise the environment is in-fact safe. So it's kind of a whole paradigm shift of your mind! I've never done anything like that before! You look at yourself inside and pick-apart the pieces and put them back together again like a jigsaw puzzle but not in the same-way. And that's a big journey...it doesn't finish. It will never finish until the day we die, till we move on... It's one big thing that covers everything: mind, body, soul... you know—vulnerability...*

Bennetts (2003) in his qualitative study on counsellor students explored the area of students' experiences of learning and perceptions of training on a person centred counselling course in higher education. He found that the counselling training and group work setting fostered experiences for making changes in feeling, behaving, thinking and relating which led to deep learning. This finding may be relevant to the participants in my study as they similarly experienced the process of deep learning and changes.

Anna also acknowledged the potential of counselling training as an opportunity for changes and deep learning. She believes that counselling training is a way of being:

*It's just be centred in yourself and being you. So that when you relate to other people whether be a client or people in your personal life, you're relating to them from a level of honesty, honest with yourself or centeredness. It is, is relating to the place of being centred and being grounded, being yourself... Yeah, it's definitely a way of being [counselling training]. And I think that it is one of those training that, when you learn how to do it in the counsellor sit you can't actually not do it when you leave.*

Lucy described the counselling training as a learning process which there is a "shift from the passenger seat of my mind to the driver seat":

*Lots of more positive stuff! Someone said the other day "You seem a lot happier than you were last year!" and I was like "I don't really feel it but I supposed I can come along more calm, and open and not so focused in my interior anymore because I feel is less stress so I'm able to look after myself a bit more. It's been some definitely shifts and I think is mainly valuing growth over comfort which allowed me to do that. I think that's always a value of mine: restoration and growth and freedom , that's what drew me to counselling and when you are immersed on it, you know, it's when what you're studying it becomes even more real to your everyday life, more noticeable and I think things are highlighted... That's something maybe about counselling training where I've seen shifts and I've seen the fruits of it so much that it seems more doable and it seems more simpler, it's not this untenable,*

*like 'I could never' it's more like 'I just have to make this decisions and then will be a shift'. Everything feels a lot more like in my control now and if I want to, I can, I have the strength! I feel more powerful so I think being immersed in that and constantly practising counselling on each other as well sees all your everyday niggly things. You constantly find tuning yourself so growth becomes a lot more doable, you can see it a lot more. It's like I shift from the passenger seat of my mind to the driver seat. And it's like scary as well.*

Continuing with the counselling training and deep learning theme, Beatrice described her development:

*Knowing what to ask, knowing how to be with people, makes it so much easier to have small talks with people! Knowing how to talk in counselling means that now in personal life when I'm out and meet people or whatever, it's so much easier to get to know people and really hear people... You know the whole 'aham' becomes in tuned. Suddenly all your heart and mind in tune with my whole holistic being... my body responding to things... my heart, my thoughts.... and being like 'oh, why that memory came to mind? Trusting those things more...*

Rocky's voice is one of wonder and excitement with his new changes. He tells of his challenging and deep journey of self-development during the counselling training and the effects of the process brought forth. His speech is rich with meaning, for example “*throwing out all these slogans and words,*” and “*not changed but changed back to original-self*”:

*I mean it was challenging, it was difficult....it's a life changing process...how do I see the whole experience of development? Of the counselling training and what did to me? It's an experience of restoration, I guess. Um...I'm just digging into something... something deep...throwing out all these slogans and words...it's big...it's a life changing experience of healing; it comes at the right time...I don't know if you believe in, like, you know, destiny...like it was part of my destiny. It was healing; I was just like...restored and changed...not changed but changed back to my original-self.*

The student has related personally to the learning which has been generalized to other areas of the student's life (Prochazka, 1995). As Anna stated:

*Even though we were doing academic papers it will still related back to us personally... so we were able to look a lot closer... like transitional analysis... child and parent, adult... how we react and respond to other people... hum... so yeah... every paper we'd done last year we were really looking at ourselves as well...*

Counselling training impacts both internal and external changes as the person thinks differently inside their own head and views themselves differently looking outside of themselves and back at themselves (Schultz, 2001). About this training impact in his own life, Rocky reveals:

*I guess the impact is in your whole life—all my relationships...for me I thought for a while when I was going through the experience everything is kind of like... um...kind of mixed...It's not as grounded as it is now, everything changes...so for a while everything is kind of disjointed as you're finding yourself again and people rediscover you. I guess your whole world changes because you change, so everything around you changes. And you try new things with people and new ways of being...with the change you can go overboard with people before you kind of put the brake-back-on.*

Bennett-Levy and Beedie's (2007) qualitative study explored the trainees' perspectives on the development of competence during counsellor education. They found out that self-perception of competence did increase significantly over time but there is considerable variation across skills and between individuals. In my project, Anna described the counselling training as a catalyst for bringing her confidence forward and the "I can" and "I am" attitude. She made a decision to proceed further into the counselling training and she believes that even if she "wasn't go on with counselling" she would be able to "go on and do anything" because her perception of competence increased significantly:

*Even if I wasn't go on with counselling, which I am, I think the training from this would enable me to go on and do anything I want to do because it gave me that confidence in myself that I can and I am. It's really exciting!*

One of the counselling training experiences to facilitate deep learning, where 90% of what we both say and do is remembered (Brockbank & McGill, 1998), is experiential learning, which Kolb (1984, p. 38) defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”. Experiential learning fostered experiences of reflection, self-reflection and critical thinking in all the participants in this research which are the abilities are core skills of a professional counsellor (Brookfield, 1987). Anna described her process of experiential learning in a group during her counselling training. Anna is now in a new position in her life where she is able to “*really look*” into herself. Prior to these changes she had described the experiential learning in the group as annoying but she now has a sense of being “*more solid*” in herself:

*At first it really annoyed me [counselling training and working in groups]... So that will get me on really look into myself and how I respond to other people, the interactions that happen between other people... I'd gone along for years thinking I'll learn how to respond rather than react and last year I realised I still reacting rather than responding. Because these things were still triggering me, I was still thinking... This person said something rude to me but now I'm able to say and go 'I'm wondering what's happening for them?' rather than taking in as a personal 'that hurts my feelings!'... 'That really upset me and they're horrible for doing that.' So now I'm able to go 'Oh, that's interesting! I'm curious to know what's happening for them to be speaking that way or acting that way'. [Giggles] So, it's kind of made me more solid in myself...*

In such ways, counselling training prioritises the teaching of interpersonal skills aimed at creating a safe, nurturing relationship for another person so that growth can occur (Rogers, 1961). For Rocky, being through the experiential learning during counselling training and in a nurturing relationship with

others in there fostered significantly his interpersonal skills and “*kind of transformed the old into the new*”:

*I think it took time for me to realise that's ok. I'd be sitting in a group situation and cognitively I knew all my class mates were great people, I could see that. They were like open people, good people, I think I should feel secure but it takes time for my body to catch on, almost a whole year, to sit there and feel like Ok, yes, not only do I know in my mind but I can feel in my body I feel safe and relaxed, totally present. So for me was a time thing and kind of like, of course, examining all those old thoughts and ideas and going back and kind of understanding that this is a new moment, a new life. Say for example like I was very quiet at school naturally and years after I'd been at school I went to college and I thought sweet! Because I had been in a job where I was dealing with people all the time and I felt outgoing but when I stepped back into a classroom and as soon as I sat there the same old feeling...kind of paralysed, small...and then ten years later I went to counselling training college and kind of transformed the old into the new.*

Participants in this study appreciated their deep learning during counselling training and they spoke with awareness and excitement about their changes and challenges. The participants' voices were full of emotion and joy about their counselling training and newly discovered deep learning experiences. Counselling training were a significant experience in their development.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has reported seven important themes within counsellor development, as expressed by the participants' voices. The essential message is the absolute willingness by the participants to be fully committed to and engaged in a life long journey of professional and personal development. These themes will be illuminated in further in the following chapter.

### 5.1 5.1Introduction

*“From these pages I hope at least the following will endure- my trust in the people and my faith in human beings and in the creation of a world which is easier to love” – Paulo Freire, 1972, p.24.*

The focus of this research was to find out more about the experiences of development during counselling training. This research aimed: to hear and illuminate participants’ voices; to give freedom for the participants to express themselves freely; to amplify knowledge in the area; to enhance counselling education and counselling practice; and to promote people’s development in general, and in this way help to create a better world. All the aims of this research were significantly met.

The literature review revealed significant knowledge on counselling development but what was not commonly found was the expression of the actual voice of the undergraduate counselling student. There was wealth information on stages and processes of development, but little to be found on providing space and offering attentive listening for the counsellor student to express their voices freely regarding their meaningful experiences during training.

This research asked undergraduate counsellor students in training what the experiences that promoted their development were. They were provided with a private and safe environment during the interviews where the researcher made an effort to immerse herself in the participants’ world of experience, in a sensitive way (Raskin & Rogers, 1980) and their voices were recorded, transcribed, and reported. This research does not have the intention of presenting any judgment or evaluation but

instead, it presents low level of interpretation of the data collected. The aim of the research was to serve as an instrument to give voice to a specific population, in this case, undergraduate counsellor students. The research is designed to be a helpful instrument of free speech and illumination of universal themes such as tendency of actualisation, authenticity, vulnerability, the importance of support, difficult experiences in life, self-care, and deep learning. All of the themes emerged spontaneously from the participants and this research serves as a mirror to reflect and honour those themes from their voices. All the participants showed significant willingness and engagement to answer the questions during the interviews and their voices can be heard in the previous chapter. They have described their experiences, feelings, thoughts and development during their inspiring journeys of counselling training. Their voices offered the opportunity to incorporate universal themes into development in counselling education and in others caring professions.

## **5.2 Summary of Findings**

The acknowledgment from the participants emerged and formed seven mayor themes which all presented significant level of connection and interdependence between then. Throughout the interviews all participants linked their experiences back to the phenomenon of development so the themes are all connected to this central notion. For each participant, this seemingly endless journey of becoming a counsellor expressed a synthesis of their experiences and manifested itself in singular, but at the same time, similar ways as demonstrated in my model (Figure 2).

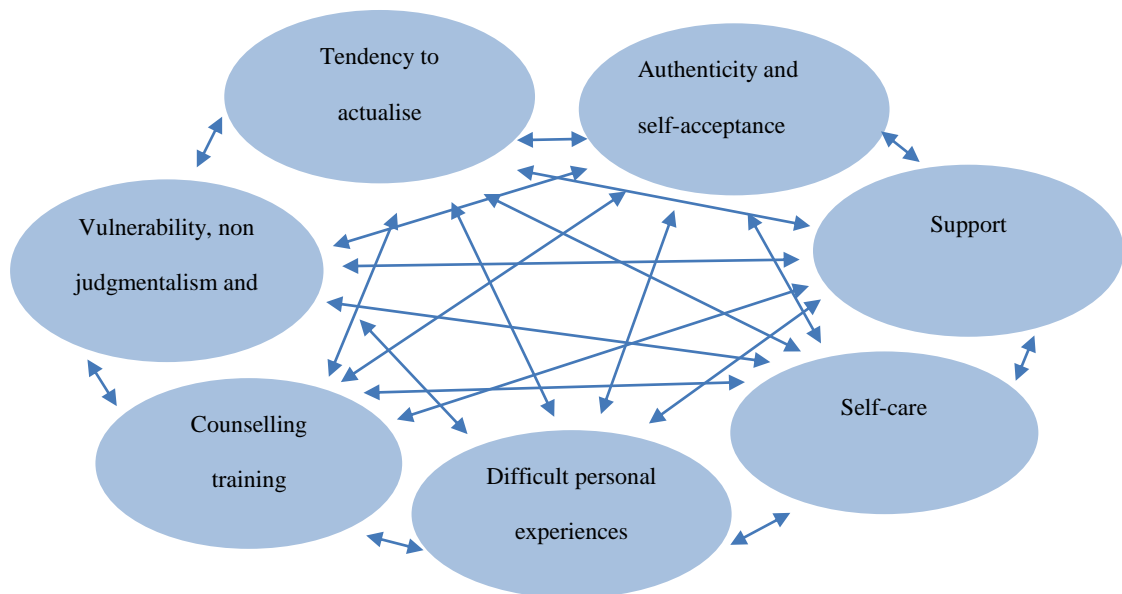




**Figure 2. The central idea of development and the connection with other seven themes**

Ramos (2018)

Each of the seven themes was interconnected and complemented one another. The figure below reveals a rich web of interconnectedness between the seven themes. There are arrows in both directions because the themes related to each other simultaneously and in both directions.



**Figure 3. The significant level of connection and interdependence between the seven themes**

Ramos (2018)

Each of these themes interacted with the other, and together they revealed the experiences of development for counsellor students. Research illuminated the meaning that participants gave to their experiences and how these experiences promoted their development. As participants expressed their journey, several acknowledged experiences when they were progressing significantly towards development. The results of this research support previous research that found that the process of counsellor development is a multifaceted, tangled, and driving process that occurs over time (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Paris et al., 2006; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

### **5.3 Exploring and Amplifying the Findings**

The efforts to explain human development have been well reported in the literature since the early 1900s (Ellis, 1959, 1962, 1979, 2000; Freud, 1910, 1936; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1997; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969; Rogers, 1959a, 1959b, 1980). Research findings reveal that the themes emerged from the data refer to universal experiences of people development which have been well documented in counselling and psychology literature before. This research makes several unique contributions to the literature and these are outlined below. Overall, the findings of this research support previous perspective of development which “relies heavily upon the concept of the self as an exploratory construct” (Raskin & Rogers, 1980, p.143) and was founded upon the principle of people “movement toward the realization of an individual’s full potential” (Rogers, 1980, p.133). The findings of this research also support previous literature on the concept of the wounded healer and difficult personal experiences. This chapter also reveals researcher experience and concludes with a reflection on unique contributions to counsellor development.

#### **5.3.1 Approaching the Tendency to actualise**

All participants’ voices revealed a sense of an underlying force or drive that has yet to be fully realised and an indication of Rogers (1959b) process towards becoming a person along with

“moments of movement” (Merry, 2002, p.66; Rogers, 1961, p.130). Participants described their development as being a continuous and lifelong journey guided by this tendency to actualise and learn. Similar rationale is acknowledged by others researchers (Tudor et al.2004; Merry, 2002;Orlinsky et al., 1999; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Sanders, 2006) who all reported valuable aspects of self-actualisation in counsellors.

The concept of self-actualisation has been well documented in many counselling and psychotherapy approaches. Rogers (1959b) talked about self-actualization referring to a growth force within us that predisposes us to develop in terms of our full potential. Ellis (2000) also believed humans have predisposition for development of self-actualisation and that we do not need the approval from others to actualise Rogers (1961) believed people tend to be unwilling to new experiences and tend to surround themselves with fear and that is one of the causes of maladaptive behaviour. A person who lives in fear and resistance of self-actualization, lives in psychological distress, or as Perls (1969) called it a “growth disorder”. According to Heidegger (1962), when people live in a state of forgetfulness of being, they are essentially living in a state of continual distraction and diversion to be wholly unaware of the self, and will eventually experience maladaptive behaviour. Rogers (1961) asserts that people’s freedom can be terrifying and the fear of it along with the fear of self-actualization is more likely to produce maladaptive behaviour. Rogers illuminated the need for openness to experience and the need of being in contact with our self-actualizing tendency. The ability to self-actualisation was greatly valued and supported by all the participants in my research. Nonetheless, there were many observations, which revealed that the very desire that motivates someone to train as a counsellor is evidence of “the organism’s tendency to actualise” (Tudor et al.2004, p.27).

My research findings support the idea that all people have a tendency towards development (Merry, 2002; Nelson-Jones, 2000) and the hope is that these findings will be valuable on the promotion of people development towards full potential. Development is the eternal turning of existence and going against this tendency is like going against people’ own tendency, it is like swimming against the flow.

Like trees, people should grow in the direction of the light rather than growing against their own selves and others.

### **5.3.2 Difficult Personal Experience and the wounded healer concept**

All participants revealed difficult personal experiences which they had experienced some degree of woundedness and also experienced the healing potential generated through the process of development. Perhaps pain is a necessary part of the process of becoming a therapist and maybe counselling is more than something that is so-called learned (Barnett, 2007, p.262). The findings of this research support and add to previous knowledge on the wounded-healer concept. This is explored further below.

In ancient Greece *therapy* meant a person gave service to the gods and Greek mythology gives the story of the wise centaur Chiron, who on return transformed from the depths of Hades, turned his suffering into healing others (Sahpazi & Balamoutsou, 2015, p.261). Influenced by the mythological hero Chiron, Jung was the first psychotherapist who explored the archetype of the wounded healer and its applications to psychology (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). The *wounded healer archetype* indicates that healing power comes from healer's own woundedness (Guggenbuhl Craig, 1971; Nouwen, 1972; Segwick, 1994). The paradigm of the wounded healer lays an inner wound which may not only play an important role in vocational choice, but constitutes a significant, if not essential, factor that contributes to healing in the patient (Miller & Baldwin, 1987, p.139). The wounded healer paradigm suggests that wounded and healer can be presented as duality rather than a dichotomy (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012. P.482) and that is because it is the therapist's own woundedness that gives the measure of the self's power to heal (Laskowski and Pellicore, 2002, p.403). This might suggest that sufficiently recovered wounded healers may make uniquely talented therapists (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). The participants' voices in this research focused not on the degree of their woundedness but on their ability to draw on their woundedness in the service of healing and developing.

Although minimal academic attention has been given to the wounded healer construct in counsellor education, it has been well documented that many psychotherapist have a story of pain or suffering (Barnett, 2007; Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). Prior research, exploring the influence of the therapist's woundedness indicates many positives elements, such as empathetic connection, deeper understanding and greater faith in therapeutic process (Gelso & Hayes, 2007; Gilroy, Carroll & Murra, 2001)

Pals (2006, p.1,087) reported that when adults engage in examining how an experience challenges the self and opens up possibilities for change, then the added effect of positive resolution is expected to be a narrative ending that emphasises an enduring sense of positive self-transformation within the life story. King (2001) asserted that being both mature and happy is a developmental achievement of adulthood and that adults who attained it are likely to narrate their most difficult life experiences with a sense of struggle, personal growth, and positive self-transformation. In my research, participants' voices revealed a high density of positive affect in which difficult personal experiences are followed with self-development. Pals (2006, p.1083) also suggested that subjective wellbeing is associated with the capacity to construct a coherently narrative about a difficult experience which the ending emphasizes the restoration of the positive in the person's life and a sense that the person has moved on emotionally.

My research revealed an account of participants own wounds and their meaningful processes of development. These research findings support the idea that the therapeutic effectiveness may be developed, in part, from experiencing and coping with problems in one's own life (Wolgien & Coady, 1997). This research findings suggest that the caring professions move towards an approach of greater openness and support regarding the wounded healer concept. For that, more academic attention needs to be given to this construct in counsellor education because minimal consideration has been given to it up to now and the findings reveal significant importance of the wounded healer concept on counsellors' development.

## 5.4 The Researcher Experience

In researcher's life, the impact of the study was significant as participants' voices resonate with me as a counsellor and a person. The participants and the process took me as the researcher into a position where people's development sounds very exciting and illuminating. The project research inspired me to be myself and to express myself more freely. It gave me the courage to sit with my pain and to honour my emotions and growth. The participants' voices revealed in my heart a feeling of vulnerability and strength, which definitely make my day to day journey more interesting and authentic. Beyond the personal changes and development in my life, the experience of undertaking this research promoted the opportunity for me to become more aware of the way people have been doing research and the importance of promoting free expression. For me, as a person, a counselling student, and as a researcher, the whole process of writing this thesis has been about a process of gaining awareness.

Some of the literature and the findings amazed me and they revealed interesting information not only about the experiences of development but also about the experience of conducting research and writing up the project. On the one hand, I became aware that research has the power to free people from ignorance and therefore, has the power to promote people development and free speech. On the other hand, some research findings can also go the other way and privilege some discourses above others. Academics belong to a discipline that tells stories about its past, and these stories comprise a narrative that develops along a relatively clear plotline (Dauphinee, 2010, p.807). Jantzen (1998) exposed:

“Once the model of a battle is taken as central to philosophical thinking, then the likelihood increases that instead of engaging in creative exploration of the issues, a student who is trying to learn to think philosophically will think not of what gives her insight or how that insight could be extended, but of how her position could be attacked and what she needs to do about it. When such students write essays or present seminars of their own, they will naturally try to make only a small and easily defended case (if indeed they are brave enough

to try out their own ideas at all), since in an adversarial paradigm the discussion that follows a paper is not one that tries to take up points to see how they could be developed further, but rather one which tries to demolish questionable bits. If arguments are set up so that they must be 'won' or 'lost', most people, at whatever academic level, will try to present cases which they feel confident that they can 'win'. Nobody enjoys being a loser. But this means that, in a more important sense, everybody loses, since fewer people will risk trying out adventurous ideas. Innovative thinking may well contain inadequacies. If students expect that these will be pounced upon, rather than their creativity will be fostered (while being helped to avoid potential pitfalls and dead ends), they will quickly learn to curtail their innovative or exploratory inclinations and reproduce the attacks and defences of traditional philosophical battle." (p.70)

As a researcher, I believe that if we take part of the dominant discourse where the model of battle is applied, research is restricted into a duality of winning or losing. Research should not be treated as a game between a dominant discourse and a discourse to come. When voices are equally and freely expressed there is no need to battle or to fight to defend an idea or an argument. Hence, research goes from the duality of winning and losing to a position where the main idea of the research is to give voice to a population. and to produce meaningful knowledge. I found the qualitative descriptive approach very helpful to give voice to the participants and to collect meaningful knowledge that will affect the world in a positive way. This research literature review, methodology, methods, and findings suggests that free speech is a helpful technique to capturing experiences of development. So then academic writing can be a political reproduction of an orthodox way of doing research where certain discourses are privileged above others or it can be a place where meaningful knowledge is created, free speech is promoted and people's voices are heard. This research aimed to provide a space where participants have their voices heard without privileging the veracity of any particular claim established a priori. Finding one's voice refers to the possible articulation that can be given to any experience (Johnston & Strong, 2008) and that was one of the research aims.

As a researcher, I would like to emphasise the importance of promoting a safe place for free expression. Participants were offered a private room to express themselves freely and the researcher was totally present with the participant with the intention of listening to what participant was saying and making certain what the participant said was recorded and understood accurately. The data collected consisted of meaningful experiences and rich deep revelations. All the participants expressed their thankfulness in the end of the interviews and/or by e-mails, which suggests that expressing themselves freely was a helpful process for them. This research suggests that collection of rich data might be fostered by offering participants a safe place where they can express self freely.

By adopting a qualitative descriptive approach I was able to allow participants to express the self freely and therefore, they revealed rich data regarding their experiences of development. My research suggests that it will be beneficial for other research participants to be encouraged to express themselves freely. I truly hopes that this work will have a positive effect in people's lives as it had on my own life. I also hope that this research will help the promotion of people development and free speech in the academia.

## **5.5 Unique Contributions to counsellor development**

In this research, participants' voices revealed unique contributions to counsellor development and offered a possible step forward in this endless journey of becoming a counsellor or simply *becoming* (Rogers, 1961). As suggested in previous literature, models of counsellor students' development guide the education and practice of future counsellors (Woodside et. al, 2007; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Arman & Scherer, 2002). In this research, counsellor students' development related to subjective and objective experiences. This research offers knowledge that may facilitate students development and support research in the counselling and others caring professions. Many of the statements that emerged from the participants' voices are consistent with previous counselling and psychology literature and this research adds to that dialogue.



These research findings suggest that certain specific objective and subjective experiences are relevant processes in counsellor development and that they might be helpful fostering during counselling education and counselling practice. The participants' voices also revealed the significant importance and effect of those experiences in their personal (non-counsellor) lives which suggests that those experiences may promote a more general type of development. According to Dobbs (2015, p.89) the process of *becoming* is common to us all and the other findings of this research revealed that the journey of becoming a counsellor might be part of this bigger and endless journey of *becoming*. This research was one of the places where the journey of self-development was illuminated by its natural tendency. The fundamental philosophical concept of the organism's tendency to actualize was seen to be the predominant in all aspects of counsellor experiences of development. The findings also strongly suggest the value for counsellor education programmes is to foster opportunities for counsellor students to promote their self development as a task of being an effective counsellor. As participants identified numerous experiences that contributed to counsellor development, counsellor education programs could be encouraged to include and promote these insights into the curriculum. A chapter with concluding thoughts follow ahead.

### 6.1 Strengths and Limitations

As with all research there are some strengths and limitations of this study. One strength is that this research presents a small number of participants, which gave thick rich descriptive insights that offered a reflective opportunity to add meaningful and in-depth understanding of the undergraduate counsellor students' experiences into counsellor education. However the findings cannot be generalised but may resonate with the reader, enabling them to immerse themselves in the world of self development.

A further strength of this research is the diversity of the participants. They were mainly female but included one male. They were an ethnically mixed group aged between early 20s and 50 years old. Although it as a diverse group, the themes emerged from the data revealed significant similarity.

A possible weakness of this research might be the self-selection of participants who were counselling students. They might have indicated willingness to speak their voices freely and to take part of this research about counsellor's development because they had had a positive experiences of development which they wish to express.

### 6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

There are a several recommendations for future research. First, researcher realised that the end of the year is not an effective time to recruit participants who are students because they are more likely to be busy with final assignments and family/social commitments. The educational organizations might also be busy with all the final work for the year and might take longer than usual to respond researcher. Another point that might be helpful for future research is the use of 'snow ball process' where

participants tell other people about the research and ask them if they would like to participate in it. Two of the participants of this research was recruited this way.

It would be also beneficial to conduct a similar study with people who work in other caring professions, such as teachers, psychologists, and nurses to gather rich and meaningful information about their experiences of development. A larger research project involving one-to-one in depth interviews with other caring professionals where they can talk freely would increase the body of knowledge on this topic by identifying universal experiences of development. The experiences of development for the caring professionals are more likely to be similar because they all contribute to the development and care of others. A comparison study between in depth interviews and questionnaires could be conducted to determinate which is the most helpful approach to gather qualitative data from participants in research.

Another important area of future research is how the concept of self-actualisation in counsellor development corresponds with the concept of the wounded healer. It would be informative to counsellor development to know if turning suffering into healing the self and others contributes to the self-actualizing tendency and vice versa. It would be informative to know if pain is really a necessary part of the process of becoming a therapist and how to transform it towards development? A research utilizing the concept of wounded healer with the focus on self-actualisation will also amplify knowledge to this work.

It would also be valuable in further developing this current study into a larger one involving one-to-one in depth interviews with people who are over 75 years old about the experiences that promote development in life. This research will help New Zealanders to become aware and identify experiences that promote their development and reinforce it in their lives. This might be helpful on developing New Zealander's development and might help mental health improvement.

People wishing to promote development in their own lives can take from this study what is helpful to their own journey. Perhaps some of the participants' voices may have so much sense to you that something deep in your inner core is touched and a joyful development process can start from there.

This research can be used to enhance discussion about development, or perhaps be used as an inspiration for other counsellor or caring professionals to illuminate their own helpful experiences and to foster their own development.

### **6.3 Acknowledge the Participants**

To become aware of one's own development as a counsellor, during the training years and throughout one's own career, is a fundamental factor of healthy counsellor development (Donati & Watts, 2005; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007, Furr & Carroll, 2003; Morrisette, 1996). Further, gaining awareness into one's personal feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, as well as knowing how one is perceived by others, is very important for the development of counsellors (Hulse-Killacky & Page, 1994). It is important to identify and examine factors that influence student professional and personal development because "overlooking these needs and issues can have significant implications for both counsellors and the clients they serve" (Furr & Carroll, 2003, p. 39)

Each of the participants who contribute to this research generously offered their time, their voice, their experiences, and their emotions and that was the essence of this study. As the researcher I feel extremely thankful to the participants for their willingness to participate and for having the opportunity to learn from them. They offered so much that it is fair to state that this research belongs to them because they were the ones who produced the valuable and inspiring data. This research project could not have been accomplished without them and their precious participation is gratefully acknowledged. Their voices might help and inspire anyone working anywhere in counselling or other caring profession.

## 6.4 Final Thoughts

This research illuminates experiences of development which participants encountered through their journey during counselling training. The findings suggest that experiences of development are associated with self-actualisation, authenticity and self-acceptance, vulnerability, non-judgmentalism and compassion, support by others, self-care, turning difficult experiences into knowledge, and deep learning. The experiences vary between participants but all of their experiences can be grouped into themes and they all connect to the central idea of development.

This research was not only about the experiences but also how the participant experienced the process and how they transformed what they went through into the service of development. It is really a precious piece of knowledge that was offered by the participants and their willingness to express themselves freely may take on greater meaning. What has been learned from this research might be put into practice in any setting that illuminates counsellors' development.

The initial desire that moved me into doing this research was to discover experiences that help people in this endless movement of development. The initial desire was to illuminate people's experiences of development and to produce meaningful and helpful knowledge. The awareness of self-development can emerge from the reflection of own experiences of development, and it seems that once the process starts it is more likely that will continue to flow endlessly.

As a researcher I also believe in the importance of becoming open to the experience of development for the promotion of wellbeing and development. Rogers (1963) exposed the importance for openness to experience, "it would be evident that for the person who was fully open to his experience, completely without defensiveness, each moment would be new" and "he can fully live the experiences of his total organism, rather than shutting them out of awareness" (p.24). It may be that when people are open to all the possibilities of existence in the present, then they are more likely to get into higher stages of self-actualisation, authenticity, vulnerability, self-awareness and freedom, and therefore, higher stages of development. The participants' voices suggested that even difficult experiences can promote development (wounded healer concept) and the findings of this research

suggest that people's development and self-actualisation is part of our nature. It may be helpful to accept and foster the self's own nature which is development, which is movement. Living without developing is the same as living without being fully alive. People without development can get stuck in the same place with the same old ideas for the rest of their lives. Those people are not moving. In contrast, people who are "*keeping pushing it up*" and who are willing to engage in development, are in the process of expansion. All the participant's voices revealed that they are in contact with this self-actualisation tendency: not only in contact with it, but actually this tendency is the motor that keeps them moving towards development despite the fact that moving towards development means, sometimes, staying still with their authentic self and sitting with their emotions.

One of the findings of this research, and consistent with other existing literature, is that universal tendency of people to develop. In a counselling scenario this knowledge is incredibly important because to foster development in the client's life, the counsellor needs to be able to do it first in their own life. A person can only go deep inside other people's heart, once she or he has been deep inside her or his own heart. People all have similar experiences in life and are all bound to develop themselves. However, it became crucial for counsellor and other caring professional to give development priority in life because different from others, they do it for a living. Another curious point is that all the participants talked about their experiences of development showing distinct willingness and joy for the process. This is a significant point because "service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served". (Gandhi, 1957, p.175).

This research reveals some valuable knowledge regarding the experiences that promote development and a lot of more questions rose in between the lines written in here: Have the experiences that promote development been fostered in our society? How the findings in this research be applied in educational settings? What is the source of development? Where does it come from? What make some people really willing to development and others not so much? What is that force within us that push us towards growth?

In qualitative research the data usually is collected from a few cases or individuals and findings provide rich descriptive knowledge regarding specific themes and cannot be generalised to a larger population. However, this research findings is related to universal themes like self-actualisation which is heavily supported by previous body of knowledge about people's development. So then, another big question rose: Can the findings in this research be generalised to people in general? The possibility of future generalisation of the findings in this qualitative research is definitely something to be considered.

These research findings reveal some subjective experiences and objective experiences that are key components of counsellor development but the process of development still a mystery because it goes deep in people nature. Researcher is aware and humbly acknowledge that this research is just only another brick on the wall of the construction of a better world where is easier to love and where people are allowed to express self freely and develop themselves towards all they are capable of becoming.

## **6.5 Going beyond final thoughts**

*"If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change."*

(Gandhi, 1964, p.158)

*"What is most personal is most universal."*

(Rogers, 1961, p.26)

By engaging in creative and descriptive exploration of the issues, this study it is part of a non-orthodox way of doing research that hopes to promote the construct of a better world. The findings of this study suggest that development in undergraduate counsellor students is linked to some specific

experiences in life such as self-actualisation, authenticity, self-acceptance, vulnerability, non-judgmentalism, and compassion. The participants' voices showed that going through those experiences promoted significantly their development on the journey of becoming better counsellors and hence better people. A world where people are better is, consequently, a better world. The point here is that the journey towards a better world it might be a personal journey towards self-development, about fostering certain experiences in life.

The research findings exposed the importance of going through these experiences of development in the journey of life. By illuminating experiences of development, this research might be helpful on promoting development of counsellors, clients, and the wider community. As a consequence, this research might be helpful on the development of a better world where self-development and free speech are the master keys.



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**Appendix A: Interview Questions**



**“Experiences of professional identity development for counsellor students: a qualitative descriptive study”**

**Master of Counselling: Interview Questions**

Main question:

What are the experiences of development for undergraduate counselling students while in training?

Follow up questions if required:

- \* What does professional and personal development mean to you?
- \* How is personal and professional development of counsellor trainees experienced while in training?
- \* How is personal and professional development of counsellor trainees facilitated while in training?
- \* In what ways is professional development counsellor trainees related to and influenced by their personal development?
- \* How do you promote professional and personal development in your life?
- \* What changes in professional and personal development can you recognize in yourself since you have started your counselling training?
- \* Who/what supported you?

\* What activities do counsellor trainees participate in outside and inside of training that promote professional and personal development?



## Appendix B: Human Ethics Committee Letter



### HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson  
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: HEC 2017/86

13 September 2017

Luisa Catizane Ramos  
Health Sciences  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Luisa

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "Experiences of Professional and Personal Development for Counselling Students: a Qualitative Descriptive Study" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

*pp. R. Robinson*

Associate Professor Jane Maidment  
*Chair*  
*University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee*

## Appendix C: Information Sheet for Participants



Department: Health Science

Telephone: 64 0221014197 E-mail: lcr45@uclive.ac.nz

### **“Experiences of professional identity development for counsellor students: a qualitative descriptive study”**

#### Information Sheet for Participants

This study is being undertaken by Luisa Ramos, as part of a Master of Counselling at University of Canterbury. The purpose of the research is to explore the professional and personal development as it is experienced by undergraduate counselling students. Central to the project are interviews of counsellor students with the researcher that focus on students' experiences and development. Findings will be written into a report.

Thank you for showing interest in this project! If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be making time for an individual interview which will cover topics around experiences of your personal and professional development while training to be a counsellor. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed to be analysed for completion of the thesis. As a follow-up to this interview, you will be offered the opportunity to read through the written transcript of your interview, making any changes so it accurately represents what was said and meant.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures of this study there is some risk that thoughts and feelings may bring an emotional response, to this end you are welcome and encouraged to bring a family member or friend with you to the interview. At any point you may discontinue the interview and support will be offered. You will be encouraged to access the student health services if required.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw up until the time the data is being analysed (15th of January, 2018). You may ask for your information to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you, however, once analysis of raw data starts on (estimated) September 25th 2017, it will become increasingly difficult to remove your data from the results.

All participants will be treated with justice, safety, truthfulness, confidentiality, warmth, respect and equity. Each interview will be approximately half to one hour, but flexibility will be used and the possibility of a reschedule appointment will be discussed where required. As

a counsellor student I am aware of respectful engagement, if you become upset I will allow time for you to rest and I will remain with you in that environment. I will remind you of your choice regarding participation or not on the research. All of these aspects are in accordance with New Zealand Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics by which I abide.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure confidentiality, no information that identifies you will be included in transcriptions and all related electronic files will be password protected with access limited to the researcher. The only people with access to raw data will be the researcher, transcriber and supervisors. Data obtained for the purpose of this study will be held as per UC guidelines for 5 years. Please note a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC library.

The project is being carried out by Luisa Ramos under supervision of Kate Reid, who can be contacted at [kate.reid@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kate.reid@canterbury.ac.nz), and Judi Miller ([judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz)) they will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to the Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, you are asked to complete the consent form and you may hand it to me directly or return it via e-mail [lcr45@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:lcr45@uclive.ac.nz). Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

With sincere thanks for your consideration,

Luisa Ramos 1st of October, 2017

## Appendix D: Consent Form for Participants



### *Experiences of professional identity development for counsellor students: a qualitative descriptive study*

#### Consent Form for Participants

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- ☐ I have the opportunity to clarify questions
- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time up until the data is being analysed (15 of January, 2018), without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and supervisor. I understand that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or place. I also understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed. Including counselling services may be accessed if I require this support.
- ☐ I understand that I am able to receive a report on the findings of the study by contacting the researcher at the conclusion of the project.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher, Luisa Ramos, at lcr45@uclive.ac.nz or supervisors Kate Reid at kate.reid@canterbury.ac.nz or Judi Miller at judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

☐ I would like to receive a copy of my transcript to check accuracy.

☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project and have supplied contact details to receive this.

☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address (for report of findings, if applicable):  
\_\_\_\_\_

To return consent from you may email to or hand to researcher.

Thank you!

## Appendix E: Research Poster



### **“Experiences of development for undergraduate counsellor students: a qualitative descriptive study”**

Research Project



#### **Wanted: undergraduate counselling students-in-training**

Hello there! I am a counsellor-in-training conducting a Master's thesis on the development of undergraduate counsellors' students and I am looking forward to hearing from you about your professional and personal experiences (:

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be making time for one individual telephone or Skype session interview. A certificate to the research project will be produce to you for use in your professional portfolios.

#### **Have your voice heard!**

It would be great to have your valuable input to help create meaningful findings.

## Appendix F: Certificate of Participation



*Certificate of Participation awarded to:*

\_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

For involvement in research: *Illuminating the Journey of Counsellor Students: Hearing their voices and Experiences of Development*

You have fulfilled the following:

\* 3 hours given to the research project

\* Proven commitment to the research project

\_\_\_\_\_

Luisa Ramos –Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_

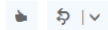
Kate Reid- School of Health Sciences

## Appendix G: Support Letter from Maori Health

### E-mail of support from support from Maori Health researchers School of Health Science



Luisa Ramos  
Tue 4/07/2017, 1:40 p.m.



Dear **Sonja** and Annabel,

I am currently undertaking a study "Experiences of professional and personal development for counselling students: a qualitative descriptive study" as part of my Master of Counsellor at University of Canterbury under supervision of Kate Reid. The purpose of the research is to undergo an exploration into the professional and personal development as it is experienced by counselling undergraduate students. Central to the project are interviews with the researcher with a small number of students talking about their experiences and development. At the moment, I am working on the Human Ethics Application.

Maori are not being selected as a specific cohort but may be participants. However, I perceive no issues around cultural safety and am committed to conscious use of Treaty principles being employed throughout the study. Researcher will be responsive to the needs and diversity of Māori. But should any Maori students sign up, could you please consult with them if an issue arise ?

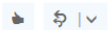
Thanks for your time!

Kind regards

Luisa Ramos



**Sonja** Macfarlane <[sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz)>  
Tue 4/07/2017, 3:46 p.m.



Kia ora Luisa  
Thank you for your email - I am happy to support you here with any queries / provide guidance. It sounds like an interesting study. All the very best  
Ngā mihi mahana - warmest regards  
**Sonja**

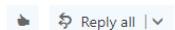
Associate Professor **Sonja** Macfarlane, PhD  
Senior Research Fellow  
School of Health Sciences  
University of Canterbury  
Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand

Phone: +64-3-369-5110, Ext 95110

\*\*\*



Luisa Ramos  
Mon 10/07/2017, 2:06 p.m.  
**Sonja** Macfarlane <[sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz)>; Annabel Ahuriri-Driscoll <[annabel.ahuriri-driscoll@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:annabel.ahuriri-driscoll@canterbury.ac.nz)>; +1 more ↗



Sent Items

Kia ora **Sonja**

Thank you for your email and support!

Warm regards

Luisa

\*\*\*